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# OUR RECENT ACTORS:

BEING

## RECOLLECTIONS

CRITICAL, AND, IN MANY CASES, PERSONAL,  
OF LATE DISTINGUISHED PERFORMERS  
OF BOTH SEXES.

*WITH SOME INCIDENTAL NOTICES OF  
LIVING ACTORS.*

BY

WESTLAND MARSTON.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,  
*LIMITED,*

St. Dunstan's House,  
FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1890.

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SAMPSON LOW & Co., LTD., ST. DUNSTAN'S HOUSE,  
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TO  
JOSEPH KNIGHT, ESQ.,  
OF LINCOLN'S INN, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

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MY DEAR FRIEND,

It may probably have occurred to you, as it has done to myself, to glance in leisure moments at the dedications which were published a century or two ago. I confess to having read them with considerable amusement, and, perhaps, with a slight feeling of contempt; for the poet's praise of the patron was usually in such superlatives, that he often evinced more imagination in his dedication than in his poem. Were the patron a warrior, he was, at least, an Achilles; were he a poet, one would think that Homer and Shakspeare ought to hold up his train; were he a legislator, Solon or Lycurgus would be eclipsed; while, in the event of the book being inscribed to a lady, the three Goddesses who contended for the golden apple were at once superseded in their respective attributes by the modern divinity. One naturally reproaches such clients, to use the old phrase, with insincerity and servility.

And yet I have at length learned, from experience, some toleration for them, for *you* have taught me that seeming hyperbole may well consist with truth. Of the man whose imaginative sympathy and refinement have not only endeared

him to some of our best poets, but made him a poet himself; of the critic whose rare discernment has been in nothing more conspicuous than in his quick detection of merit; of the friend who has rejoiced in the successes of others as if they had been his own, while their misfortunes have called forth his untiring devotion—" *Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni*;"—of such a man, I draw a portrait which, though absolutely faithful, may be regarded by those who do not know him as purely ideal.

Accept from me these Recollections touching an art in which we are both deeply interested, and

Believe, dear Knight,

In the profound and grateful affection of

Yours always,

WESTLAND MARSTON.



## PREFACE.

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IT has often been asserted that the mere glamour of youth induces playgoers to prefer their early favourites to the actors who succeed them, though the latter may be of equal or even of superior merit. Were such a statement absolutely true, the writer of these pages might have an additional reason for distrusting his fallible judgment, especially in the cases of those bygone performers with whom he was acquainted. It may, nevertheless, well be that the assertion in question, if true at all, is chiefly true with respect to that part of the public which has laid aside theatrical interests with youth, and which, on occasionally repairing to the theatre in later days, brings with it a mind which has lost its old ardour not only by time and disuse, but by the grave pursuits and anxieties of mature years. With those, however, whose sympathy with dramatic art has not been interrupted, the case, it may be hoped, is different. Long experience may possibly, in their instances, have more than

counteracted early bias and even personal regard, while a yet warmer interest than that of youth in theatrical representations may have been developed by habit and opportunities of comparison. In the list of these the author trusts that he may be included. As a matter of fact, it has happened to him, as to many old playgoers, to find, in numerous cases, the same enjoyment from the present race of actors as that derived from their predecessors. In some few cases the enjoyment has even been superior. With the class of playgoers described, whatever the correctness of their judgment, there is at least a desire to judge impartially, and to estimate each performer, in each part, according to his individual merits. With these critics the forgotten power of Macready, in the play-scene in "Hamlet," has not blinded them to the excellence of Mr. Irving in the same scene; they who most admired the former actor can admit that Salvini surpassed him in Othello. The remembrance of the great Rachel has not prevented them from seeing in Ristori, Sarah Bernhardt, and Madame Modjeska, a tenderness in which she was often deficient. Helen Faucit, Ellen Tree, Charles Kemble, have not left us insensible to the claims of Mr. Hare, of the Bancrofts and the Kendals, of Miss Terry, Mrs. Bernard Beere, Miss Ada Cavendish, or Miss Amy Roselle. Recollections of Liston, Harley, Keeley, or Wrench, have not



deprived the humours of Mr. Toole, Mr. John S. Clarke, or Mr. Thomas Thorne of their mirth-moving power; nor have the gallantry and ardour of Mr. James Anderson rendered us indifferent to the same fine qualities in Mr. Henry Neville.

The "Recollections," whether critical or personal, have chiefly reference to past actors. Sometimes, however, living performers have been commented on either when comparison between themselves and their predecessors seemed desirable, or when they have so long retired from the stage that their career is become part of its history, or where they have been particularly associated with some remarkable event—such, for instance, as Phelps's management of Sadler's Wells. Many names of contemporary actors are, however, omitted, which would have high claims to notice had the writer's main object been to treat of the existing Stage.

In some rare cases, when the press and general report have pronounced a performance strikingly representative of the actor, the writer has given a sketch of it in his own words, though he may not have seen it. Notices of this kind have been derived partly from consultation of journals of authority, partly from statements of friends—some of whom were critics of celebrity, and minute in their information. The sketches referred to are those of Mr. Charles Kemble in Mark Antony ("Julius Cæsar"); of Mr.

W. Farren in Michael Perrin ("Secret Service"), and in Old Parr; of Mr. Phelps in Sir Pertinax MacSycophant; of Mr. Alfred Wigan in "Still Waters Run Deep;" of Mr. Charles Mathews as Sir Charles Coldstream in "Used Up;" and the brief reference to Mr. Webster as Richard Pride.



# OUR RECENT ACTORS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY ACQUAINTANCE WITH LONDON THEATRES— DENVIL, VANDENHOFF, AND OTHER ACTORS.

Coming to London—First visits to theatres—Sadler's Wells—Miss Macarthy—Mr. G. Almar—Mr. Cobham—Mr. T. P. Cooke—Mr. T. Archer—Anecdote of him and Macready—Covent Garden—Manfred—Miss Ellen Tree—Mr. Denvil—Mr. Vandenhoff—His chief performances—Anecdote of him—Miss Vandenhoff.

THIS book is, so far as it goes, an autobiography. It is a narrative touching persons and things seen by the writer, with the exception, in some few cases, of matters which became known to him on trustworthy authority. He has tried to say as little about himself as consists with the due setting of his various portraits. He has not forgotten, however, how much in autobiography (witness the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn) a touch of surrounding detail gives life to the chief matter described. Thus in the notice of Mr. Charles Kemble he has recalled the bright summer weather, the brilliant whirl of London in the height of the season, and the gay and

crowded thoroughfares of the West End through which he made his way to the Haymarket. Such details, moderately used, give reality to the pictures they frame, and bring them down from the abstract by relating them to particular times and circumstances.

To speak in the first person, which, spite of its necessary egotism, is the most convenient form of narrative, I came from the Lincolnshire seaport and market-town of Great Grimsby to London in the year 1834, having at that time attained my fifteenth year. It had been arranged that I should be articled to my uncle, a solicitor, who, with his partner, had offices near Gray's Inn. The partner's house was my first abode, and here I found—or perhaps I should say, took—more liberty of action during my evenings than was quite suitable in the case of so mere a boy.

Two years previously, on my first visit to London, I had been arrested by the playbills of the great patent theatres and by the magical name—then still a sound of lingering greatness—of Edmund Kean. “Drury Lane!” “Covent Garden!” “Mr. Kean!” Strange how these words of romance had some way penetrated to me through the seclusion of a “serious” home in the country, where my excellent parents never mentioned the stage, except to warn me, or others, of its dangers and seductions.\* Now that at a too early age I was, in many respects, my own master, and could indulge, if I chose, my longing to visit a theatre, I began to ask myself what there was in dramatic per-

\* My father, who had seceded from the Church, was a dissenting minister.

formances that should make them necessarily objectionable. I recalled my own annual displays when, as a lad of eleven or twelve, I had appeared with my schoolmates at the Theatre Royal, Great Grimsby, in various dramatic characters, at one time sustaining on "breaking-up day" the part of Juba in "Cato," and another that of Electra in the tragedy of "Sophocles," and afterwards that of Miriam (the Christian convert) in Milman's "Jerusalem Delivered." I remembered, too, how much my father, a zealous lover of Sophocles, though a foe to the stage, had praised my rendering of Electra. Was it possible, I argued, that a mode of composition allowable and, indeed, admirable in Greek, should be censurable in English, or that dialogue which was innocent when read should become injurious when spoken in public, with dresses and scenery to assist the impression? If the theatre might have its bad side, so also had literature, art and even trade. If no judicious parent would put "Tom Jones" into a boy's hands, was that a reason for withholding the novels of Scott? Must "Don Quixote" be forbidden because the word "fiction" applied also to "Gil Blas"? With this kind of logic I extorted a reluctant permission from my conscience for an act which, if allowable in itself, was still one of grave disobedience towards affectionate parents. I can still recall the boyish sophistry which prompted me to choose Sadler's Wells Theatre for my first visit. It was a small theatre, and it was situated in a suburb—facts which, as they were likely to diminish my pleasure, seemed in the same degree to make my transgression a slight one. I might have gone to Covent Garden, I reasoned,

and, at that renowned theatre, have revelled in the best acting of the day, whereas I self-denyingly contented myself with Sadler's Wells. On the night when I entered that (to me) enchanted palace, I found there a new opiate for my restless conscience. The title of the piece represented I quite forget, but its main situation is as fresh as ever in my memory. A girl, deeply attached to her betrothed, learns his life is at the mercy of a villain (of course, an aristocrat), whom she has inspired with a lawless passion. She implores his pity for her lover, only to find that the sacrifice of her honour is the price of his ransom. I remember how my heart came into my throat and the tears into my eyes when the noble-minded girl, striking an attitude of overwhelming dignity, before which the wretch naturally abased himself, spurned his offer, and committed her cause to that Providence which, in the good, honest melodrama of that day, never delayed to vindicate the trust reposed in it. What most comforted me during the evening was the conviction that my father, could he have seen the piece, would heartily have applauded it and recanted at once his unqualified enmity to the theatre. I fancied how cordially, had he been behind the scenes, he would have shaken hands with Miss Macarthy (afterwards Mrs. R. Honner), who had no inconsiderable skill in painting the struggles of virtuous heroines. I might certainly, however, have trembled for the consequences had he encountered a certain Mr. G. Almar, who, if my memory serves me, personated the miscreant of the drama.

I was curious enough, even on the first night



of attending a theatre, to ask myself why Mr. Almar made such incessant use of his arms. Now they were antithetically extended, the one skyward, the other earthward, like the sails of a windmill; now they were folded sternly across his bosom; now raised in denunciation; now clasped in entreaty, and considerably maintained in their positions long enough to impress the entire audience at leisure with the effect intended. I was critical enough to ask myself whether the more heroic attitudes of this gentleman would not have been heightened by the contrast of occasional repose, and whether there were, in his opinion, any fatal incompatibility between easy and natural gestures and effective acting. On quitting the theatre, my inquiring mind received some light upon these points, for in the window of a confectioner, who was also a theatrical printseller, my attention was arrested by coloured portraits of local, or other stage favourites, in their principal characters. Here figured "Mr. Cobham, as Richard the Third," with a frown to spread panic through the ranks of "Shallow Richmond." Here was Mr. T. P. Cooke,\* as William in "Black-eyed Susan," in that renowned hornpipe which illustrates William's happier days, ere Susan and he had dreams of a court-martial. And here figured my friend of "The Wells," Mr. G. Almar, in various characters, in all of which the use of his arms was so remarkable, that it might easily be inferred he acted less for the sake of his general audience than

\* I met one morning this famous nautical actor, during a call on Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean. Mr. T. P. Cooke's thorough heartiness, "go," and physical activity, were the grounds of his success. In private, his manners were frank and engaging. He was greatly respected by the members of his profession.

for that of the artist who depicted him, and who probably would have thought little of an actor who did not supply him with attitudes. I was glad, moreover, to find from one of the prints that Mr. Almar's arms were not always employed to illustrate sinister characters, but that on occasions they could be virtuously engaged. In this particular instance they represented the action of the noble Rolla in "Pizarro," as he bears Cora's rescued child triumphantly over the cataract.

On my second visit to Sadler's Wells, a drama taken from Scott's novel, "Rob Roy," was the leading piece. The part of the romantic cattle-lifter was performed by a Mr. Archer, whose demeanour in the part was singularly haughty. The erect carriage of his head, set upon a slender neck, his scornful look and folded arms, as he exclaimed to his captors, "Villains and slaves! you have not yet subdued Rob Roy!" were, to my young experience, in the last degree imposing. This gentleman, then fulfilling a star engagement at "The Wells," was, I believe, a well-known actor at the West End theatres. A droll anecdote, of which he was the hero, was told to me by the late Mr. Bayle Bernard. I give it pretty nearly in his own words, the humour of which seized on my memory.

On one of the performances of "Virginius," Archer had to sustain the part of the wicked Appius Claudius, to Macready's Virginius. In the last act, where Virginius, exclaiming—

"And have I not a weapon to requite thee?  
Ah, here are ten!"

springs upon Appius and chokes him, Macready was so carried away by his own intensity, that

his tight and prolonged grasp of Archer's throat had well-nigh converted the fictitious catastrophe into a real one. The half-suffocated representative of Appius bore his trial in meek silence on the night in question. Archer, however, who delighted in solemn fun, and who could humorously assume the grandiose language of the stage in private, had a lesson to read the tragedian. When Virginius was next performed, Macready, on entering the Green Room in the interval between the fourth and fifth acts, discovered that the throat of Archer was encased in a dark velvet collar, which, with its shining points, was a strange innovation on the costume of a Roman Decemvir. The Virginius of the night contemplated Appius awhile in gloomy silence, then slowly approached him. The shining points just mentioned were now seen to be small steel spikes, which protruded from the collar, and would infallibly give a rude reception to any hands which might grasp the neck it encased. As it was set down in Macready's part that he should perform this very operation, it is not surprising that he viewed the new feature of Mr. Archer's attire with decided disapproval. Breaking at length the absorbed silence which he usually maintained during his rare and brief visits to the Green Room, he addressed the object of his suspicion.

MACREADY. "Are you—are you—aware, Mr.—Mr. Archer, that that—that peculiar ornament round your neck is—is quite inappropriate to your character?"

ARCHER. "I admit it, sir; but the last time I had the honour of appearing with you in this

rather unsympathetic part, you seized and held me with such violence that I hardly expected to act it again! Acting, after all, in my humble opinion, is but feigning. I am not a gladiator or a wrestler, sir, and I set some value upon my windpipe."

Macready, said my informant, for a moment put on an expression of lofty indignation, but, whether from policy or from a sense of humour (in which he was by no means deficient), he quickly exchanged it for a look of amusement, and, laying his hand familiarly on his brother actor's shoulder—a rare condescension indeed,—exclaimed—

"Archer, if my feelings carried me away the other night, I apologize. I give you my honour I will deal gently with you in future, and that you will have no need of—of that singular appendage by—by way of armour."

So the obnoxious collar was removed before a summons came from the call-boy. Mr. Bernard assured me that, in all essentials, this anecdote is authentic.

Shortly after my second visit to Sadler's Wells, I found myself a unit in a struggling crowd at the pit entrance of Covent Garden. The thought that I was soon to be within the walls of so renowned a theatre had kept me in a happy fever of wakefulness during the previous night, and in the morning had possibly made my perusal of "Chitty on Pleading," or the last volume of "Reports on Equity," the most barren of studies.

Covent Garden was at this time under the management of Mr. Alfred Bunn. He had recently produced there Lord Byron's drama



of "Manfred," the dramatic picture in this case having been put upon the stage less for its own sake than for that of its gorgeous spectacular frame. Some histrionic ability had, however, been enlisted for the piece. Miss Ellen Tree (whom I then saw for the first time) declaimed the lines allotted to the Witch of the Alps—lines which are not only few, but almost devoid of dramatic force, serving only to draw out Manfred's long and gloomy retrospect. Nevertheless, in her appearance, as she stood within the arch of a rainbow—in her garments, which seemed woven of aerial colours touched by the sun—and in her voice, the tones of which, though sweet, were remote and passionless—she realized all the weird charm of a genius of lake and mountain. There was something glacial in her unsubstantial loveliness, something that belonged to the forms of sleep rather than those of common day. Well, therefore, did Byron's sister write of this performance soon after the production of *Manfred*, "Miss Ellen Tree's Witch of the Alps I shall dream of."

The haughty and mysterious hero of the drama was represented by Mr. Denvil, who had performed with fair success the characters of Shylock and of Richard the Third. The new tragedian, though he subsequently failed in "*Othello*," had some measure of poetic feeling, and considerable power of facial expression. General praise was accorded to his *Manfred*. Boy though I was when I saw him in this part, I still remember his pale, almost spectral face, thrown out by his dark garb, and a haughty isolation and melancholy in tone, look, and gesture that well conveyed the mingled pride and remorse of one

who, though racked by the sense of a hidden crime, has won commerce with supernatural beings. Very impressive was his delivery of the passage in which he recalls Astarte and her fate, nor less so the look of self-recoil which accompanied its close—

“She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,  
 Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone  
 Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;  
 But soften’d all, and temper’d into beauty :  
 She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,  
 The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind  
 To comprehend the universe : nor these  
 Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,  
 Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not ;  
 And tenderness—but that I had for her ;  
 Humility—and that I never had.  
 Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—  
 I loved her and destroy’d her !

*Witch.*

With thy hand ?

*Man.* Not with my hand, but heart—which broke  
 her heart ;—

*It gazed on mine, and wither’d.”*

The words in italics were given with an intensity of horror and remorse that no actor could well have surpassed. The judgment of a lad of fifteen on this point may not be worth much ; but I find that the effect produced by Denvil on myself was shared even by some of those critics whose condemnation of his subsequent performance of Othello was most unsparing. Why an actor should be fairly successful in Richard the Third and Shylock, really fine in Manfred, and yet fail totally in Othello, is not at once obvious. From the attacks of his critics, however, upon this last personation, the actor never recovered. A few years afterwards I saw him at one of the minor theatres as the hero of a melodrama. Possibly

from a belief that the want of physical force was the cause of his previous defeat, Denvil had now so exclusively cultivated this quality that his acting had degenerated into the worst style of provincial rant. Of the ease, refinement, and poetic appreciation and quick insight into character and motive which he had at times exhibited, there was not a trace. Distorted features, violence of gesture, and strain of lung were all the resources left to him. Ere long he seems to have been quite forgotten by the public. It is said that he ultimately became check-taker at one of the minor theatres, and died in obscurity, in 1866. This story of self-realized oblivion on the part of an aspirant, who at the outset displayed some fine qualities of his art and gained some distinction, is, surely, deeply pathetic.

My visits to the theatre now became frequent. I have a dim but pleasing recollection at this time of "Man—Fred" (a capital burlesque of "Manfred"), at the Strand Theatre, in which a comedian named Mitchell performed the principal character. He had a feeling of genuine humour, which restrained him from undue exaggeration in the part, while he showed a droll likeness to the moods of his tragic original. When the curtain rose, and Mitchell—I think, as a working bricklayer—inspected with gloomy dejection an empty quart measure, there was in his first utterance—

"The jug must be replenished; but even then  
It will not hold so much as I could drink;"

a deep, fixed, self-absorbed despondency, which recalled, with delightful absurdity, Denvil's tones as Lord Byron's hero—

"The lamp must be replenished ; but even then  
It will not burn so long as I must watch."

I saw and relished Mitchell in one or two other comic characters, but soon lost sight of him. It is on record that he achieved a marked success at the St. James's Theatre, in 1836, in a serious character, as the hero of a piece called "The Medicant." I have an impression it was shortly after this performance that he went to America, where he died, at the age of fifty-seven, in 1856.

About this time, too, I have recollections of Mrs. Waylett as Apollo in "Midas." She had a charming voice, an arch, bright expression, and was not only a good vocalist, but fairly effective in comedietta and farce. In these happy days of youth I paid my first visit to the Olympic Theatre, of which an account will be given in the chapter on Madame Vestris. Ere long I found myself within the walls of the Adelphi. There I remember seeing Mrs. Honey in some farcical piece, and Mr. John Reeve as Cupid. The lady's one qualification for the part seemed to be a pretty but already worn face, and a coquettish simper ; while the obesity of Mr. Reeve was the chief point of humour in his assumption of Cupid. I had previously seen him at the Queen's Theatre, in Tottenham Street, in "Catching an Heiress," as an ostler who absurdly counterfeits a German baron. This performance, again, gave me no particular idea of Reeve's humour. The part would have been droll in any hands if the audience, as at "The Queen's," could once have tolerated its extravagance. I record, however, impressions which may have been ill-founded. My judgment was necessarily immature, and it



is not to be denied that both Reeve and Mrs. Honey—the former especially—had a large circle of admirers. At the Adelphi, also, I first saw Mr. O. Smith, celebrated for his delineations in melodrama, both of villains and of supernatural agents. That he could be very thorough in such personations, suggesting at times by his voice, expression, and make-up unfathomable wickedness; and again, that he could freeze the spectator with his weird appearance and action in apparitions from another world, I can still recall. He was, in a word, the nightmare of the stage. I saw him seldom, however, and retain no clear remembrance of any of his particular characters. A far higher impression, though less distinct than I could wish, is that of Mrs. Yates, wife of one of the lessees. There flits before me the figure of a slender, elegant woman, with a low, expressive voice, capable of very subtle inflections. This actress struck me as being eminently gifted with quiet strength. Her power of this kind in sarcasm, bitterness, or intense grief, was truly remarkable. In the expression of these emotions she did not seem to be acting; she spoke as a lady might have spoken in a drawing-room, and moved you without a trace of effort. A scene at a masked ball, to which she tracked her faithless husband and his mistress, stands out still in my recollection, though I have forgotten the details of that particular scene; and, young though I was, I felt how widely Mrs. Yates's suggestive acting, in which feeling and intellect happily blended, separated her from the many actresses who mistake restlessness for animation, and violence for power.

On the revival of "Othello" at Covent Garden,

for Denvil, the part of Iago was performed by the elder Vandenhoff. It was in this character that I first saw him; and, both from the testimony of criticism at the time, and from my own impressions, I could scarcely have seen him to better advantage. He assumed a mask of impulsive light-heartedness and *bonhomie*, a good-natured pliancy which made him everywhere *bon camarade*. There was at times even a sort of detestable gaiety in his soliloquies and asides, as if the cleverness of his wickedness and the follies of mankind diverted him, and made it half a pastime to work out his malignity. I am by no means asserting that this is the highest conception of Iago that could have been formed, but it was original and dashing; there was Italian subtlety in it, and it gave great scope for the execution of Iago's villainous designs. The impulsiveness he so well feigned in this part was a contrast to his usual style of acting, which was elaborate and somewhat heavy. He had, however, great dignity, a powerful and melodious voice, and his means of expression had often been so happily thought out that, in such characters as Coriolanus, Creon, in the memorable English reproduction of *Antigone*, and Adrastus in Talfourd's "*Ion*," his acting was finished and impressive. Pathos could by no means be called his strong point; yet sometimes his pathetic bursts (as in the case of Adrastus) were very telling, partly from their contrast with the general self-repression and dignity of his manner. He may be said to be the last prominent tragedian of the Kemble school, having a good deal of the stately carriage and bold outline of his predecessors, without, I suspect, quite the same tenacity of feeling and minuteness of suggestion which

distinguished them. In his last days his acting became over-deliberate and tedious. In his prime, however, he was always more than respectable. Neither his Macbeth nor his Othello (which latter I saw him perform to Macready's Iago) were to be greatly praised for intensity of passion or for the light shed upon internal conflicts; yet his power of facial expression, his excellent elocution, largeness of style, and fine bearing, carried him successfully through.

I met Mr. Vandenhoff several times in society. He was agreeable, well-bred, and more addicted to humour than could have been inferred from any of his stage characters except Iago. An amusing peculiarity of his may here be noted. He had so great an antipathy to the "harmless, necessary cat" that the presence of that animal in the room was a trial beyond his endurance. A friend of mine, whenever Mr. Vandenhoff was expected, was accustomed to take the strictest precautions that pussy might neither be found coiled in comfort before a fire, nor flitting along hall or staircase when her visitor ascended. On one occasion, when he chanced to be her guest, the ingenious animal contrived to defeat all the means used for its exclusion, and entered the drawing-room with the usual complacent cry of a feline pet. A shriek at once gave vent to the panic of the dismayed tragedian, who could scarcely have been more appalled by the apparition of Banquo's ghost than by that of this domestic favourite.

Miss Vandenhoff, the actor's daughter, though her appearances on the stage were not frequent, was an actress of considerable merit. She was the original Parthenia in "Ingomar," and the

original Margaret Aylmer in "Love's Sacrifice. Her performance of Antigone—the character in which Lady Martin (Miss Helen Faucit) won so much celebrity—was deservedly praised for its classic simplicity, its grace, and pathos. She had, too, an agreeable voice, and many passages of the tragedy were charmingly intoned. Miss Vandenhoff was herself the author of a drama, the heroine of which she performed at the Haymarket Theatre. It contained some poetic and telling lines. I recall one from the lips of a blind girl, when suffering from some cruel injustice—

"Only by tears I know that I have eyes."

Miss Vandenhoff died in 1860, at the age of forty-two; her father at that of seventy-one, in the following year.

These preliminary recollections bring me almost to the time when I first saw Macready.



## CHAPTER II.

## MACREADY, AND OTHERS OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

Juvenile disappointments with regard to certain actors—Causes of this—Mr. Samuel Butler and Mrs. Lovell—Surrey Theatre under Davidge—Butler's extreme tallness a disadvantage—Author first sees Macready in "Macbeth" at Drury Lane—Effect of his performance—His Hamlet—His fracas with Bunn—His reference to it in conversation eight years afterwards, and advice to the author—Macready in Lord Lytton's "Duchess de la Vallière," at Covent Garden—Helen Faucit—Macready as Melantius in "The Bridal"—Adaptation by Knowles of "The Maid's Tragedy"—Detailed criticism of Macready's acting in this play—Criticism of his *Virginus*—His lesseeship of Covent Garden—Success of "Henry the Fifth" and "The Tempest"—His *Richelieu*—Account of the first night's performance—Note—Macready somewhat dissatisfied—Mr. Edwin Booth's *Richelieu*—The author's first play—Macready's acceptance of it for Drury Lane, of which he was become lessee—Visit to him at that theatre—First impression of going behind the scenes—First interview with Macready—His genial welcome—His personal appearance and manner of speaking—Talk as to my play and as to Miss Helen Faucit—As to his own part in the piece, and his fear of being too old to look it—His objection combated—Reference to the "Lady of Lyons"—Its early want of attraction and subsequent success—Charm of Macready's manner.

A BOY'S ideal in art is not always easy to satisfy—partly, perhaps, because he has a sharp appetite for the wonderful; partly because he is, to a great extent, unacquainted with the subtler and profounder emotions, and the symbols which

represent them. Much that is really significant may have no meaning for him ; reticence may be mistaken for tameness, and noisy excitement for feeling. However this may be, I had vaguely figured to myself more intensity and grandeur in tragic passion than I met with in the first year of my theatrical experience, except in the performances of Mr. Samuel Butler and Mrs. Lovell, formerly Miss Lacy, of Covent Garden. These performers occasionally played as "stars" at the Surrey Theatre, then under the management of that seasoned comedian of the old school, Mr. Davidge. Both of them were thoroughly in earnest, well trained in their art, and of commanding presence. The extreme height of Mr. Butler, indeed, was a disadvantage to him in a small theatre. In the capacious "Surrey," however, his uncommon stature was less perceptible. Like his fair associate, he was a good elocutionist, and, like her, he had the excellent quality of abandoning himself to passion without self-criticism. He never seemed to ask himself, as I have known actors of great intelligence do, "Shall I seem stagy if I adopt this movement? If I give passion full play here, shall I be accused of rant?" but, being already a proficient in the technical resources of his art, he trusted himself in good faith to the leading impulses of the character. I do not think he was given to rant. He occasionally exploded in sudden, vehement bursts, but they had the effect of being spontaneous—the outcome of passion accumulated and repressed. In the crises of feeling you saw, in him, that passion, though sometimes intensely hushed in white heat, darts forth at others in fiery tongues and roars—I do not care to use a weaker phrase

—in its ascent. He was gifted, moreover, with a powerful voice, and had no need to hide the defects of a feeble physique by feigning that mysterious self-control which has since been called “repressed force.” I saw little of Butler after the time I now write of, but enough to confirm my first impressions of him. In Shylock I was more carried away by him, so genuine was his passion, than by any other actor I have seen in the part. I will not undertake to say that his interpretations were as profound as they were undoubtedly vivid. I do know, however, that he was “terribly in earnest,” and that he had the power of rousing masses to enthusiasm. His excessive height, as has been said, was a great disadvantage, and stood in the way of his being fully appreciated. Finally, like most tragic actors of his time, he was overshadowed by Macready; but whether I owe the taste to Butler or to nature, not, I hope, being insensible to higher merits, I have never lost my liking for a good physique, and, in many characters, for a good display of it—in Othello, for instance, where passion or intellect tell all the more if the actor have also lungs. Mr. Butler died in 1845, at the age of forty-eight; Mrs. Lovell, at that of seventy-three, in 1877.

It was in 1835 that I first saw William Charles Macready. The play was “Macbeth,” the theatre Drury Lane. This actor, always prominent from his first appearance in London, had, since the death of Edmund Kean, gradually won his way to the tragic throne.

The expectations which I had indulged as to the first actor of his day must have been unreasonably high. I remember comparing him

with my favourite, Butler, much to the advantage of the latter. What, however, as a boy, in the pit of Drury Lane, I missed in his *Macbeth*, I still to some extent missed when, many years later, I saw him take his final leave of the public in the same character and at the same house. Of his *Macbeth*, however, as of his other characters, I shall speak afterwards in detail. On my first acquaintance with it, spite of its many excellences, I was disappointed in every act except the last, in which the immense energy and striking contrasts of his acting roused my fervent admiration. The only other displays by which the actor had greatly impressed his precocious critic were his lost abstraction after the temptation of the witches in the first act, and his harrowing remorse after Duncan's murder, when dragged from the stage by Lady *Macbeth*, in the second act.

*Hamlet* was the next of his representations at which I "assisted." In this part his passionate and powerful acting absorbed and delighted me. It had the free impulse and the sense of the supernatural which I missed in much of his *Macbeth*.

It was soon after this performance that Macready, under considerable provocation, committed an assault upon Bunn, the Drury Lane manager. He was immediately engaged for Covent Garden, where, on his first appearance, the curious spectacle was exhibited of the public applauding an actor for conduct which he felt and confessed to be most blameworthy. British audiences are for the most part disposed to fairness as well as generosity. However, at times they allow themselves to become blind

partizans, and to espouse (as they did in this case) a side enthusiastically for the sake of a favourite, rather than for that of justice. It is possibly a luxury to constitute themselves a jury, while dispensing with the judge's charge. Bunn's conduct in calling upon Macready to perform maimed characters was, no doubt, annoying, but he was legally within his rights, which the tragedian could scarcely say of his retaliation. I allude to this well-known quarrel chiefly for the sake of reporting Macready's own words to me upon the subject. Conversing with him in 1843, I happened to express some juvenile resentment at an attack made upon my first play by one who had previously been lavish in praise of it. Though I had possibly expressed myself warmly, to proceed against my assailant, "*par voie de fait*" had certainly not entered my mind. I was therefore not a little surprised to find myself suspected by my collocutor of pugilistic intentions. "Pass it over, pass it over, for Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed. "Contempt—quiet contempt—that's the proper answer. I have never forgotten," he continued, deepening his tone, "how frightfully I let myself be carried away in the case of that pitiful man, Bunn. Though his behaviour to me was atrocious, in what I did I lost so far the right to self-respect. I have never forgiven myself for my violence. Always govern your temper, my young friend," he concluded, passing, with one of those transitions which use had made second nature to him, from a tone of agitation and excitement to one of calmness and paternal benignity.

I did not see the representation of Lord Lytton's play, "The Duchess de la Vallière,"

which was performed, under Mr. Osbaldiston's management, at Covent Garden. Though the piece was a failure on the stage, the general testimony was that Macready and Helen Faucit had seldom played with more splendid effect than in *Bragelone* and the *Duchess*.

Amongst the greatest impersonations of the former, out of Shakspeare, was his *Melantius* in "The Bridal," an adaptation by Sheridan Knowles of "The Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher. This work was produced, under Macready's auspices, at the Haymarket, which had recently passed under the control of Mr. Webster.

"The Bridal" was a great success. It increased my sense of Macready's genius, particularly of the finely harmonious variety of his method, which relieved and threw out the different aspects of his characters. His *Virginus* was scarcely finer than his *Melantius*, while in *Evadne* Mrs. Warner reached the summit of her power. The brave, loyal soldier, free and martial in his bearing, sincere almost to bluntness, seized the audience at once. Friendship, which Elizabeth's writers almost deify, glowed in Macready's bearing towards *Amintor*, with a generous and tender ardour which love itself could scarcely have surpassed. In our more worldly days, when the relations between men so seldom ripen beyond liking and good fellowship, the sympathizing devotion which set life and honour at a friend's disposal seems often mere extravagance. The old knightly sentiment, however, kindled into a blaze at Macready's contagious fire when he exclaimed—

"The name of friend is more than family  
Or all the world beside!"



In the grand scene—one of the most passionate in English drama—in the fourth act, where Melantius forces Evadne to confession, it is hard to conceive that even Betterton, so famous in the part, could have been greater than the modern actor. There was at first a grim, sardonic air about him, suggesting a terrible mirth, in the way that lightning mocks daylight, that was terribly ominous of the coming outbreak; there was a suppressed passion, a boding calm, that held the listener in awe and apprehension, till at last the pent-up rage crashed out with such vehemence, it seemed as if nothing in its path could live.

In the adaptation of “The Maid’s Tragedy” by Knowles, is a passage which, after careful search, I have not found in the original. It served to bring out with admirable effect one of Macready’s colloquial and natural touches. The loyal Melantius, who has been secretly traduced to the King by one of his creatures, demands the name of his accuser. This is still withheld, when a dispute arises on some point of fact as to which one of the King’s train persistently contradicts Melantius. This man’s zeal betrays him as the author of the slander.

“Oh, then, it came from *him*!”

exclaims Melantius. Macready’s quiet manner of delivering these words to the King, without turning to confront his accuser, whom he indicated behind him by a slight movement of the finger, expressed such superb contempt that the house rang with applause.

No feature of this actor was more specially his own than the sudden, yet natural, infusion

into his more heroic vein of some homely touch of truth which gave reality to the scene—an achievement in his own art to which great poets have furnished abundant parallels in theirs, from Homer to Tennyson and Browning. Take a few examples from Macready's performance in Knowles's "Virginius;" first, the father's affectionate raillery of Virginia in the opening act, when he discovers that, in painting Achilles, she has unwittingly given him the features of her lover—

"I've seen this face; tut, tut, I know it  
As well as I do my own; but can't bethink me  
Whose face it is."

Or, again, his impatient indulgence when Virginia clings round the neck of her betrothed, who is about to start with Virginius for the camp—

"I swear a battle might be lost and won  
In half the time; now, once for all, farewell!"

Here is an instance of a graver kind. The free birth of Virginia has been impeached, and she is likely to be seized as a slave by the pander to Appius. In the midst of his rage at the infamous accusation, Virginius is struck by an expression on the face of his daughter—

"I never saw you look so like your mother,  
In all my life."

Here Macready's transition from overmastering wrath to tenderness was made with such nature and force of contrast, that many of the audience wept. Knowles gave his exponent numerous chances for such colloquial touches. With this dramatist, indeed, they not only relieved a loftier style, but were often substituted for it.

One or two of the tragedian's revivals at

Covent Garden I unfortunately missed. By all reports, not to see him in "Henry the Fifth" was to miss a quite distinct phase of his power. This privation I had somehow incurred, both with relation to the play last mentioned and to "The Tempest," the mere pictorial and stage arrangements of which seem to have been so beautiful and suggestive, as to set one of Shakspeare's most spiritually poetic dramas in a frame of material poetry. Of one Covent Garden production, however, ever afterwards closely connected with his reputation, I have still most vivid remembrance.

In March, 1839, I fought my way with another young enthusiast to the pit door of old Covent Garden, on the first night of Bulwer's "Richelieu." What a human sea it was, and how lit up by expectation, that surged and roared for two hours against that grim, all-ignoring barrier! But its stubborn resistance, and the dense pressure which, at last, almost wedged out the breath of every unit in the crowd, gave an almost stern delight, a zest of contest for a prize, of which the lounge into a reserved box or seat has no conception. The interest connected with a new play was increased by the fact that Bulwer was the author, for with us young critics his epigrams, his rhetorical flashes, and, let it be said, a vein of aspiration and generous feeling, rarely absent from his later works, had made him a favourite. We had an impression, moreover, that he was hardly dealt with by a portion of the press, on account of his politics. The future Lord Lytton of Lord Derby's Government was at that time a Liberal.

To return to "Richelieu," in which Macready

was perfection. I think I shall probably best help my readers, not only to form an estimate of his excellence in that play, but to gain a general insight into his mind and method, if I try to live over with them my old impressions on the eventful first night of "*Richelieu*," from the rise to the fall of the curtain. This method of criticism is far too elaborate to be generally employed, but for once I will have recourse to it, and fancy that I am still fresh from the scene, while describing to the listener an event nearly fifty years old.

Suppose, then, the thronged house hushed, the curtain raised, the gay scene of the conspirators and gamesters going forward beneath the roof of *Marion de L'Orme*. Even amidst the interest of this opening scene, the thought of the house escapes to *Macready*. Will he be discovered with all the insignia of his rank and power? Will he be closeted with *Louis*, or giving audience to a spy? Will his manner have the pride of the churchman, or the smoothness of the diplomatist? The first scene is over, and we have our answer.

*Macready*, as the Cardinal, enters, followed by the Capuchin *Joseph*, and the coming revelation—signal, and in some respects new—of the actor's powers, is at once foreshadowed by his appearance. How full of individuality are the whitening hair, the face sharpened to the utmost expression of subtlety and keenness, the gait somewhat loose with age, but now quick and impulsive, now slow or suddenly arrested, which seems to give a rhythm to the workings of his brain—to his swift, contemptuous penetration of the schemes against him, on the one hand, or, on the other,

to his suspense, his caution, or his rapid decision. Soon followed one of those "ultra-colloquialisms" which, when first reading the play, he had thought incompatible with Richelieu's dignity, but which, with the dry, caustic humour he gave them, were not only very telling, but seemed natural reliefs to the strained mind of the statesman. "Orleans heads the traitors," says Father Joseph; "A very wooden head, then!" exclaims Richelieu; and, though the sarcasm was threadbare, it had all the force of novelty and wit. Examples of the actor's unrivalled power in familiar touches abounded through the performance. His manner of exposing the strategy of Baradas to De Mauprat blended with contempt an easy penetration, an amused superiority, which was quite irresistible—

"Where was thy wit, man? Why, these schemes are glass;  
The very sun shines through them!"

Early in the play were encountered some of those dazzling, but rather forced metaphors, which the author's better judgment afterwards cancelled. Amongst these, however, was one which, as Macready gave it, drew great applause—

"From rank showers of blood  
And the red light of blazing roofs you build  
The rainbow, Glory, and to shuddering Conscience  
Cry—Lo the Bridge to Heaven!"

Soon after this example of poetic pyrotechnics, Richelieu charges De Mauprat with fraud. The indignant young man advances upon his accuser with an air and tone of menace when, it will be remembered, Huguet, one of Richelieu's guard, who waits armed behind a screen to intercept any possible violence to the Cardinal, raises his

carbine to fire. Richelieu, with a wave of his hand, exclaims—

“Not so quick, friend Huguet;  
The Sieur de Mauprat is a patient man,  
And he can wait.”

The dry, parenthetical utterance of these words, with the careless accompanying gesture, had in them the secret of a terrible humour and the proud assurance of a “charmed life” that no succeeding impersonator of Richelieu has discovered. The whole of this first act is rich in those contrasts of feeling and character in which Macready delighted. The fervour with which, after finding De Mauprat worthy of his confidence, he asserts the justice of his rule, had in it all the passionate earnestness and dignity of a man who, long scornfully silent under misconception and calumny, at last relieves his heart and vindicates himself to an honourable judge. Soon follow the lines in which, under pretence of dismissing De Mauprat to death, he causes him to be conducted to the presence of the woman for whose sake he has braved it, this act, of course, implying Richelieu’s consent to their union. “Huguet,” says he,

“To the tapestry chamber  
Conduct your prisoner. (*To De Mauprat*) You will there  
    behold  
Your executioner. Your doom be private,  
And Heaven have mercy on you.”

The rapidity and sternness with which these lines were pronounced, as if only by hurry and a forced overdoing of severity he could prevent himself from giving way to the benevolent enjoyment of his device, showed one of the actor’s characteristic merits—his just perception of the



right note of feeling even to a semi-tone. The look of sly and eager anticipation with which he followed De Mauprat, as he retired, had in it all the *bonhomie* which Bulwer,\* rather than history, ascribes to the Cardinal, and the zest with which the sceptical mind of a diplomatist may for once taste pure pleasure in bestowing it.

In the second act, the contrast between Richelieu's usual scornful levity in dismissing the schemes of his enemies, and the composed but grave attention which denotes real peril, was strikingly marked. With rapid step and hands carelessly knotted behind him, he had paced to and fro, listening to Father Joseph's rumours of plots, either with incredulity or with smiling confidence in his power to baffle them. But when Marion de L'Orme entered with news of the conspiracy headed by Orleans, every trace of caustic mirth or easy, exulting contempt at once disappeared. Of course, all actors would at this point have made a transition of manner; few, indeed, would have made it with Macready's arresting effect. He questioned Marion in tones the lowness of which expressed the intensity of his interest. His trust in his own resources was still unshaken, but he felt that they might now be taxed to the utmost. The breathless audience listened to the words, "Now there is danger," as if each man had his personal stake in the crisis.

\* Having instinctively written the name by which the late Lord Lytton was best known to his contemporaries, I let it stand for the sake of remarking that, long after the celebrated author had assumed the surname of Lytton, many of his literary friends persisted in addressing him by that of Bulwer. Their reluctance to forego the appellation under which he had won so much distinction was a delicate tribute which he doubtless appreciated.

It was felt that if Richelieu could apprehend danger, there must be danger indeed. The tone of gay flattery to Marion de L'Orme at that moment of peril—

“What an eye you have,  
And what a smile, child, . . . 'tis well I'm old,”

and the ringing exhortation to the page François, when sent on his critical mission—“Never say fail again; that's my young hero!”—were brilliant examples of the actor's variety and quick self-adaptation to his instruments. The fascination which illustrious old age has for the young and aspiring could never have been better justified than by Macready's cheery laugh and the look, full of kind encouragement, with which he uttered these words to the page. I have before me a copy of “Richelieu,” marked from the tragedian's acting copy of 1843 (four years after the production of the play), in which the compliment to Marion de L'Orme is cut out—a mistake, I think, for his delivery of it was certainly one of the brilliant facets which his genius exhibited in this manifold character.

So full of fine variety was his delineation at the close of this second act, as almost to atone for its want of incident. His momentary distrust of Huguet, as he noted “he bowed too low” (some Richelieus have so over-emphasized this trait of minute observation, that they should, to be consistent, have discharged the guardsman on the spot); his brief lapse into melancholy, as he reflects on the snares that beset his bed and board, and his friendlessness at the height of power; his proud rally from these thoughts to faith in the indomitable heart of Armand Richelieu, and the quaint *bonhomie*, strangely compounded of

archness, good-feeling, and dissimulation, with which he addresses Joseph,—all received their just proportion. Each trait harmonized with, and flowed into its fellow. There was no hard line to divide, or even to distinguish, diplomacy from sentiment or sentiment from humour, but a living man in whom all these qualities naturally blended.

The third act gave scope for the excellences already noted, and with yet higher development. The Richelieu who awaited, with breathless eagerness, from François the proofs that should convict Baradas; the Richelieu who, minutely observant, even in his excitement, could pause to note the small number of the conspirators—who, learning that the despatch which would have secured his triumph had been wrested from François, one moment sternly warned him to see his face no more till he had regained it, and the next, relented into smiling encouragement—"Away! Nay, cheer thee; thou hast not failed yet; there's no such word as fail!"—was, in these various aspects, not only the same man, but so happy in expressing them that each new trait seemed to complete and enhance the others.

This third act contains the scene in which De Mauprat, duped into the belief that Richelieu, in causing him to marry, has made him a mere pander to the King, seeks the Cardinal's life in revenge. When Macready, personating the old and feeble man, encountered, without recognizing him, the armed figure whose very vizard was closed, and learned his deadly purpose, nothing could be more intense and life-like, nothing freer from inflation, than the glorious arrogance with which he exclaimed—

"Earth has no such fiend—  
No—as one parricide of his fatherland,  
Who dares in Richelieu murder France!"

It should be noticed here that Macready carefully avoided the error into which some of his successors have fallen—that of over-idealizing Richelieu, by delivering his patriotic speeches in such tones of exalted devotion as might have befitted Brutus. Macready's apostrophes to France, on the contrary, were given with a self-reference, sometimes fierce in its expression, that showed her triumphs to be part of his own. Her glory was the object of his ambition, for it made him great, while the thought that he laboured for her consciously ennobled his ambition. Thus his haughty boast in the foregoing lines was no expression of abstract and ideal patriotism (of which the Cardinal was incapable), but of passionate and practical sympathy. How fine, again, when De Mauprat, still unrecognized, betrays that the dishonour put upon him has made him an avenger, were the sudden gleam in the eye, and the hushed tones of relief which showed the statesman's sleepless vigilance at that crisis—

"I breathe—he is no hireling!"

When, in this scene, De Mauprat reveals himself, and Richelieu arrests his dagger by showing the arts that have deluded him, the actor produced one of those massive effects which make the fortune of a drama. His commanding air, as he motioned the dupe to his knees; his rapid energy, blent with a look of lofty pity, as he proclaimed that, instead of planning dishonour for De Mauprat's wife, he had saved her from it; his indignant look as, with tottering but imperial

step, he hurried to the door, and, summoning Julie, confronted De Mauprat with the living proof of his truth,—all this caused an excitement which I have rarely seen equalled. It was surpassed, however, by that supreme moment, in the fourth act, when the night of Rome seemed to pass into the sick man's frame, as he sprang up, dominant and terrible, to shield Julie from the King with the ægis of the Church. At this point the vast pit seemed to rock with enthusiasm, as it volleyed its admiration in rounds of thunder. In the final scene of the fifth act, where the Cardinal, apparently on the verge of death, attends the King to resign, and to "render up the ledgers of a realm," words can but faintly hint the excellence of the performance. How touching was the proud humility of the weak old man as he relinquished, seemingly for ever, the splendid cares of State; how arresting the sight of him as, supported in his chair, his face now grew vacant, as if through the feebleness of nature, now resumed a gleam of intelligence, which at times contracted into pain, as he gathered the policy of his rivals—a policy fatal to France! One noted the uneasy movements of the head, the restless play of the wan fingers, though the lips were silent, till at last the mind fairly struggled awhile through its eclipse, as, in a loud whisper, he warned the King his succours would be wasted upon England. Then came the moment when, recovering the despatch which convicted his foes of treason, he caused it to be handed to the King, and sank supine with the effort. Slowly and intermittently consciousness returned, as Louis thrice implored him to resume his sway over France. So naturally marked

were the fluctuations between life and death, so subtly graduated (though comprised within a few moments) were the signs of his recovery, that the house utterly forgot its almost incredible quickness when, in answer to the King's apprehensive cry as to the traitors—

“Where will they be next week?”

Richelieu springs up resuscitated, and exclaims—

“There, at my feet!”

But it was not alone by acting, however fine, in this particular situation, that his triumph over probability was obtained. He had from the beginning of the play so seized every opportunity of identifying his fortunes and life with the greatness of his country, that when the King besought him to live for France, it seemed quite in the order of nature such an adjuration should have magical force. Who can forget the electrical rapidity and decision with which Macready, as the revived minister, cut the Gordian knots of policy? The waiting envoys shall now have their answer. Chavigny, halting not for sleep or food, shall “arrest the Duc de Bouillon at the head of his armies.” Baradas, who has “lost the stake,” shall pay it and go out under guard. The barque of the State, but now tossing and plunging, a waif on the bosom of chance, has once more a helmsman, knows a course, and, through the sheer waters, bears on. And interests, dear though minor, confess the sudden change. Poor Julie, lately trembling for her husband's life, sees in his death writ but “parchment for battledores.” The epicure and traitor, De Berrighen, scents danger to his dear health in the air of Paris. On



François, the page who regained the despatch, again falls the smile that cheered and now rewards him. "He will never say fail again!" Ah, Joseph, trusty Joseph, bishop to be! The minister's policy—prompt action, daring, and retribution—the old man's fondness, the cynic's raillery, the patron's indulgence and humour,—this brilliant *résumé* of Richelieu throughout the play was so given, flash after flash, that its various effects seemed simultaneous rather than successive. Thus it was an audience dazzled, almost bewildered by the brilliancy of the achievement, that, on the instant fall of the curtain, burst into a roar of admiration that, wild, craving, unappeasable, pursued, like a sea, the retreating actor, and swept him back to the front.\*

\* In his diary Macready speaks with some dissatisfaction of his first night's performance of "Richelieu." But he was in the habit, when anxious or dispirited, of underrating his work. Thus when, after a lapse of time, he triumphantly resumed his London representations of Iago (his early appearances in the character had not been greatly successful), he was overwhelmed with such a sense of failure, that his surprise next morning to find his performance regarded as a masterpiece must have been as great as his delight. The rapturous reception given to his first performance of "Richelieu," and the tone of the press on the occasion, are vividly remembered by the writer. It may be added that in the foregoing description of "Richelieu," he has relied not only on his first youthful impressions, but upon confirmatory ones drawn from many later representations.

I may perhaps here be permitted to observe, for the benefit of younger playgoers, that one of the best "Richelieus" since Macready's, and the one that most recalls him, is that of Mr. Edwin Booth. He gives the character a more modern air—a greater air of *everyday* realism—than did Macready, though realism of a certain kind was one of the latter's strongest features. That Mr. Booth, however, is not deficient in the more heroic aspects of the character, all who remember his splendid acting at the end of the fourth act can abundantly testify.

Pressing occupations and frequent absences from town now for a time diverted my attention from the theatres. When once more able to enjoy my favourite recreation, I was, though but just of age, a married man; I had published my first tragedy, and was anticipating an interview with Macready, to whom it had been dedicated. Reports had reached me from his friends that he contemplated the production of my play at Drury Lane, of which he was recently become lessee, while his letters to me, though they did not distinctly state such an intention, were pleasantly consistent with it. To end suspense, I wrote to him as to these reports, and immediately received an answer, stating that they were well founded, and inviting me to call upon him at the theatre.

These lines were written in October, 1885, forty-four years after presenting myself for the first time at Drury Lane Theatre. All the circumstances of my call are, however, as freshly present to me as if it had been made yesterday—the taciturn janitor who had probably been apprized of my coming, and who, I fancied, regarded the stripling visitor with civil astonishment; the boy who was at once sent in with my card, and the grave official who soon afterwards appeared from the inner door of the theatre, and, saying in low tones that Mr. Macready would be glad to see the gentleman, requested me to follow him. The vast stage—quite deserted at the time we crossed it—lay in a mid-day twilight, through which, nevertheless, one slanting ray of the outer sunshine clove sharply, striking with Rembrandt-like effect upon the dim and shrouded auditorium. More than once my guide warned me of scarcely visible obstructions, or indicated steps over which

I should else have stumbled, speaking all the while in a tone of melancholy, mysterious dignity, as befitted one—for ever separated from the common herd—who, as connected with Drury Lane Theatre and its august manager, had prematurely gained the secret of life, and found that nothing was left to explore. Doubtless my imagination had reflected on the worthy man its own romance; for to me this passage in life was nothing less than romance. I was about to see not only Melantius, Virginius, and Richelieu, but Hamlet and Macbeth. It was like having an interview with Shakspeare by proxy. With such feelings I paused at the manager's room; the door opened, and I was in Macready's presence. He sprang up from the table at which he was writing, and gave me a cordial welcome. Of the coldness and the assumption of dignity which I had heard ascribed to him there was not a trace. Proud, no doubt, he was. I had opportunities, later, of seeing him when some unworthy taunt on his management or his acting stung him more poignantly than might have been expected, but his pride on these occasions took the form of impetuous anger rather than of haughtiness or contempt. But to proceed with my impressions. His tall, imposing figure, his expressive eye, his broad, massive brow (too massive for beauty), might well have satisfied any reasonable anticipation. If I felt a moment's disappointment, it must have been from some subtle influence of association which made me seek to identify him with his characters. I could hardly have expected in private to see him in armour or in a toga; yet, absurd though the feeling was, it seemed strange to me to find him in a frock coat. I was immediately struck by the difference

between his voice in conversation and his clear and musical articulation on the stage. He now spoke in a kind of half-smothered bass, which, like his frequent pauses and self-corrections in talk, was too full of individuality to be unpleasing.

Our talk, of course, turned upon the play of mine which had been the means of introducing us. He was good enough to speak of it in very cordial terms, and to compliment me by remarking that my heroine would give some scope to the powers of Miss Helen Faucit, my warm admiration of whom he fully endorsed. After some discussion of the part intended for himself, he observed, "But, after all, your hero is young, and I doubt whether I should have the air of youth, especially in the dress of to-day.\* Now, would you not prefer Mr. Anderson to play the character?" I should have been a very bad diplomatist had I assented to this suggestion; but, fortunately, I had no need of diplomacy, for my feelings ran in the same direction as my policy. I strongly expressed my disrelish of the proposal, adding that my chief pleasure in the production of the piece would be gone if Mr. Macready himself did not appear as my hero. "The very thing to have said," observed an intimate friend of his when I related this little passage. "How much you would have dropped in his estimation had you taken him at his word!"

"Whether your piece will run," continued Macready, "is more than I can predict. It ends tragically; but audiences like a happy ending. Still, as I hope you know, this theatre is not conducted purely on principles of gain, but with

\* "The Patrician's Daughter," the play referred to, was one of then contemporary life.

some desire to encourage dramatic literature." On my assent to this, he resumed—"Of the fate of a play no amount of experience enables a man to judge. It is not always that even happy endings and capital construction insure success. Now, I may tell you," he said, in a confidential tone which inspired his young listener with all the complacent self-importance of one trusted with a State secret—"I may tell you that I played 'The Lady of Lyons' for a fortnight or three weeks to a serious loss, and that nothing but my sense of obligation to Bulwer, who had presented the play to me in aid of the cause this theatre supports, would have induced me to keep it in the bills. Yet you see what a success it eventually became."

These remarks were probably intended to moderate any over-sanguine views which I might have formed respecting my own piece. The conversation then turned upon one or two of our friends, and charmed with the tragedian in his private character, and convinced that it must be an unjust world in which such a man could find detractors, I left the theatre.

## CHAPTER III.

## MACREADY—CONCLUSION.

Macready's friends and acquaintance—At dinner with him—His guests—His first wife and his sister—Table-talk—Browning's "Blot on the Scutcheon"—Opera of "Acis and Galatea"—Its admirable cast—Unprecedented beauty of its reproduction—Scenery by Stanfield—Invention of a stage-sea with motion and sound—Compliment paid to Macready by a lady on the production of the opera—Pictures and picture-dealers—Pæstum and the Romans—The poet Pope—Humorous reminiscences—Anecdote of Porson—Macready a Liberal in politics—His objection to the phrase, "lower classes"—An evening reception at his house—Singing of Herr Staudigl in "Acis and Galatea"—Assembly of celebrated authors, artists, etc.—Macready's irritability at rehearsals, etc.—Author's impression that this was to a great extent assumed—His *King Lear*—This, in the writer's judgment, his greatest Shaksperian performance—Detailed account of it—Macready's motto, "Patience is genius," examined—Unjust to his own spontaneity—Walter Scott and Sheridan Knowles—Macready's disparagement of Garrick—His theory that goodness was essential to genius—His *Macbeth*—Regarded by his friends as his *chef-d'œuvre*—Examination of his performance at length—Also of his *Hamlet*—His *Othello*, *Iago*, *Evelyn* in "Money"—His *Benedick* in "Much Ado"—His great performance of *Werner*—Full account of it—Summary of his various characters—His psychological insight and artistic power of expressing emotion—His *King John*—His *Shylock*—Anecdote in note as to his revival of "King John" at Drury Lane—His *Gisippus*—His *Spinola* in "Nina Sforza"—His religious sentiment—The characters peculiarly suited to him—His defects and peculiarities—Comparison of him with contemporary actors—His intensity—In certain parts approaching Edmund Kean's—General estimate of his genius—His death.



THE guests at Macready's table were, in many cases, representative men and women, whose very presence was a testimony to the intellect and cultivation of their host. Besides being the friend, amongst writers, of Wordsworth, Thackeray, Dickens, Carlyle, Bulwer (the first Lord Lytton), Browning, Tennyson, John Forster, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Norton, Lady Morgan; amongst painters, of Stanfield, Maclise, Etty, and David Roberts, it may be said that few had obtained any marked reputation in literature or art without making his acquaintance. On the first day that my wife and myself dined with him, in 1842, we met, amongst others, Messrs. David Roberts, R.A., Boxall, Zouch, Troughton, author of "Nina Sforza;" also, though his name is omitted in Macready's diary for the day, John Elliotson, M.D., an able physician who dared to think for himself, and whose treatment was often as brilliantly successful as original, though his advocacy of mesmerism roused much opposition and controversy, and was looked upon at the time as heterodox by his professional brethren.

Here a word of pleasant recollection may be given to the wife and sister of the tragedian. The first Mrs. Macready, the "Kitty Atkins" of his father's company, possessed that union of gentleness with cordiality which is always most winning. There was a sweetness in her countenance and a delicate grace in her manner peculiarly feminine. I had the pleasure of taking in Miss Macready, who showed no little observation and genial humour. She had much of her brother's quick perception, with a playfulness of expression very rare with him, though very charming when displayed.

The conversation turned very little upon the drama or the theatre, though, in the course of the evening, Macready adverted with emphatic admiration to an unpublished play by Robert Browning. It was, I believe, "The Blot on the Scutcheon," subsequently performed at Drury Lane—a work which, in point of passion and that noble utterance in which reality and imagination blend, yields to none in the series of great plays with which the most profound and poetical dramatist since Shakspeare has enriched our literature. A passing reference was also made to the late reproduction of "Acis and Galatea" at Drury Lane. The presentation of this opera was one of the great triumphs of Macready's management, first, on account of its splendid cast, which included the famous Herr Staudigl, Allen, Miss P. Horton, and Miss Romer. As a frame for this opera, too, Stanfield had outdone himself in the exquisite scenery which he painted, in token of his admiration and friendship for the lessee of Drury Lane. Amongst other remarkable features was the invention of a stage-sea, which admirably imitated a natural one, both in sound and motion, and which, when the curtain rose on its solitude at the opening, was ecstatically applauded by the audience, as though it had been a distinguished actor. Macready remarked that he had never been more delighted than by a compliment paid him by a lady in reference to this production. "Now," said she, "I have *seen* a poem." The talk turned, however, for the most part upon subjects interesting to the scholar or the virtuoso—upon the various signs by which copies of the old masters, pretending to be originals, might be detected, upon ancient Pæstum

and its attractions as a Roman resort, upon Pope, the poet, and his merits. These somewhat grave topics found occasional and still dignified relief in anecdotes of picture-buyers, who had either been imposed upon by fraudulent vendors, or who had baffled them more than once, in a humorous reminiscence of travel, and in an anecdote of Porson, the particulars of which I caught indistinctly; but I believe they referred to the singularity of a man of his pursuits and tastes having written a farce.

During dinner a lady happened to speak of the "lower classes"—a phrase to which Macready excepted. "Will you let me," he said, "correct that expression? I always like to think of our less fortunate fellow-creatures as the *poorer* classes, rather than as the *lower* classes." Perhaps a conventional phrase uttered by a lady at dinner hardly needed so grave a comment, but there is no doubt that Macready was thoroughly sincere in making it. Those who knew him more intimately than I did have often testified to his earnest sympathy with the people—a sympathy which seems at first sight a little inconsistent with his overbearing manner, at times, to his subordinates in the theatre. About two months later we had the pleasure of hearing Herr Staudigl in several of the *morceaux* of Polyphemus, in "Acis and Galatea." A company of celebrities was present, amongst others, Carlyle, Browning, Procter (Barry Cornwall), John Forster, Sir M. A. Shee, President of the Royal Academy, Sir Edwin Landseer, R.A., Sir Charles and Lady Morgan, Lady Stepney, etc.

I chanced to be present at Drury Lane on an occasion when Macready was conducting a

rehearsal of "King John." The groupings of that play, and the stage business in general, were elaborate enough to account for, and almost excuse the manager's impatience. Very striking, however, was his sudden change from angry excitement, when addressing his "supers," to his unruffled courtesy of tone and look when he turned to myself or others of his acquaintance on the stage. It was, of course, not the fact of the change, but its instantaneousness, that was remarkable. From that day I conceived an impression, which still remains, that his bursts of temper were far more under his control than perhaps he himself supposed, and that he was sometimes inclined to exaggerate them that they might contrast with his after-smoothness—that he was exhibiting, in short, his beloved stage transitions in real life. I do not in the least mean to deny his excitable temper, which a Drury Lane rehearsal was of all things likely to call forth; but to suggest that its manifestations were less serious than they appeared, and that he perhaps showed off its starts and sallies to excess, that his skill in reining it in might be the more obvious.

It is now time to revert to his performances. His *King Lear*, as I saw it in his later days, when it had acquired a broader and more masculine outline than before, was, I think, his finest achievement in Shaksperian tragedy. With that poetic power of symbolism which was one of his especial gifts, there was, on his first entrance, in his accents, sovereignly imperious, and in his free, large movements (though the gait at times gave just a hint of age), the outward and visible sign, not only of Lear's strong and absolute will, but of the primitive,

half-savage royalty that we associate with remote and legendary periods. He was still a hale and zealous hunter, not unwilling, indeed, to forego the toils of State, but bribed to do so, before the full need came, by prodigal love for his children. If he became, afterwards, "a very feeble, fond old man," it was ingratitude, not the weight of years, that had thus undone him. There were many fine touches of nature in the first act. One of these was especially subtle. Lear has repudiated his once idolized Cordelia; he would fain forget her, and speak of his future plans. But, in striving to do this, his voice suddenly for a moment broke, then to the end of the sentence hardened into inflexibility. Very striking, too, was the King's demeanour just afterwards, when Kent remonstrates. His anger first showed itself in an ominous tone of warning which arrested and awed—

"The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft;"

then, as the faithful adherent persisted, it swelled into a mingling of amazement, scorn, and convulsive rage, that would have befitted a Cæsar, flattered into the belief of his divinity, and swift to punish opposition as impious. The curse which ends the act struck terror by its still intensity, and the change from wrath to agony at the words—

"That she may feel  
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child,"

almost excused the malediction. To specify all the striking details of this great performance would need an entire essay. It may be said, in brief, that as the boundless arrogance of Lear

was the sin by which he fell, so a revelation to the old man's heart—even through his disordered wits—of the common ties of our humanity was, with Macready, the great lesson of the play. Thus he threw into even unusual relief those noble passages in which the poet contrasts the lots of rich and poor, of oppressor and thrall, or in which he shows the nothingness of mortal man at his best, when he encounters the forces of Nature or Circumstance. In the storm-scene, where Lear's madness is yet incipient, and in the still more terrible disclosure of the fourth act, Macready was on ground (that of psychology), where, if we except a few inspired characters of Edmund Kean, he seemed unapproachable. His dawning insanity gleamed out in his almost parental tenderness to the fool, as if he felt instinctively the bond between them. The recurrence to a fixed idea, in his obstinate and, at last, passionate asseveration that Edgar's "unkind daughters" were the cause of his affliction, might, for its air of penetration and good faith, have been set down in the diagnosis of a physician. When complete aberration set in, the signs of it were astonishingly true and various. The keen, over-eager attention, the sudden diversion to new excitements, the light garrulousness, the unmeaning smile, or the abstracted silence, denoted by turns so many shifting moods of fantasy through which one torturing recollection, like a knell, heard in brief lulls of winds and waters, broke ever and anon. His gradual recognition of Cordelia, as the mists of delusion gradually lifted and dissolved, was a worthy climax to such a performance. Her well-known voice, her tender words, at first fixed



him as with a sweet but vague and bewildering consciousness:—

“You do me wrong to take me out of the grave.  
Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire.

You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?”

Then, how fine was the struggle towards memory and definite perception! What effort, what despondency in the failure!

“I should e'en die with pity  
To see another thus.”

And, finally, how true, how overpowering, the expression of yearning hope which he almost feared to test, as he sank trembling into her embrace!—

“Do not laugh at me,  
For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child, Cordelia.”

It is in such a delineation as this that the actor (precluded from any great originality in the *conception* of the character laid down for him) becomes in his turn almost creative, by translating the poet's ideas into an appropriate language of looks, tones, and gestures, which make that living and incarnate which was comparatively but abstract and intellectual. For such a rendering, patient observation is no less needed than sympathetic impulse. I have more than once heard Macready say, “Patience is genius”—a sentiment which, I think, originally belongs to Montaigne. Yet patience, though a proof of the interest and fortitude which genius begets, can hardly be genius itself. The tragedian, I sometimes thought, did some injustice to his own spontaneity in insisting almost

exclusively upon the value of hard work. The truth is, he found in mental activity not only a duty but a delight. His love of painting, his wide acquaintance with literature, the charm which psychology had for him, as evinced not only in his acting, where motive and character were so finely laid bare, but in the fascination of Browning's poetry, showed a warmth and extent of sympathy without which patience would have lacked its best incentive and yielded but frigid results. He was more of an enthusiast than he himself believed. One night the discussion turned upon Sir Walter Scott, and his inability as a dramatist, and why, with all his powers of characterization and situation in narrative, he had never written a play likely to move an audience. "I suppose he did not choose," said one of the party. "Choose!" broke in Macready, warmly; "it's no matter of choice. If he had had the true dramatic fire, he couldn't have suppressed it. So says Knowles, and I echo him," thus showing that in his deepest convictions, his favourite patience, though sometimes a sign of genius, was no substitute for it.

On the night in question, the after-dinner talk turned upon celebrated past actors, especially upon Garrick, of whom I thought Macready spoke with undue severity. In doing so, he broached a theory which will, I fancy, be generally disputed. "I will not believe," said he, "that a man so avaricious and self-seeking\* could have been a great actor." It was contended, on the other side, that there were abundant instances in which the moral defects of men had not

\* Surely this is a harsher verdict upon Garrick than is warranted by the facts known of him, viewed as a whole.

prevented their greatness as artists. "Meanness and selfishness," he rejoined, "must affect their *sincerity*. They cannot express with full power by mere intellect the nobler emotions with which they have no real sympathy." Here I asked whether, if this doctrine were true, it would not lead also to the conclusion that a good man must fail in the portraiture of evil, and that the actor must be morally bad who could paint bad characters—Iago, for instance, or Richard the Third. "No; that will not hold," he said. "Whoever has fine qualities can paint the base;" meaning, I suppose, that he could paint them as opposites. It was, at all events, pleasant to find Macready attaching so much value to moral character in relation to art. Though it is difficult to accept his view in its full extent, there may be a measure of truth in it. A selfish man may be very sincere in declaiming a fine burst of feeling, or even in portraying a fine nature generally; yet it is at least possible that habitual loyalty to right may give a force of conviction to the expression of it quite beyond the reach of merely sentimental approval.

The leading tragedies of Shakspeare were then discussed. "Macbeth," in addition to its grandeur of imagination, was voted his most perfect play for the stage. Various allusions to our host's embodiment of the guilty Thane led to the inference that it was regarded as his *chef-d'œuvre*. I could not altogether subscribe to that opinion, my reasons for which will appear in the account I shall now give of his performance.

Of all Macready's representations, that of

Macbeth probably most satisfied himself. He had performed no Shaksperian character more frequently; it was that, moreover, in which he took his leave of the stage. Though it never realized my ideal, I learned, as I grew in years, to appreciate its many excellences. After the departure of the witches, in the first act, the air of brooding reverie in the soliloquy, with a strange sense conveyed in the fixed and fateful gaze of impending evil, the insidious encroachment of evil, spite of brief but terrible recoil, and afterwards the overdone warmth with which he excuses his abstraction to Rosse and Angus, were rendered with consummate skill and effect. In the scenes where Lady Macbeth prompts him to the murder, his resistance seemed somewhat too feeble for the remorse he has afterwards to display. "One of John Kemble's most effective passages," said that fine critic, W. J. Fox, "was the one beginning—

"‘We will proceed no further in this business,’

which he uttered with such a sigh of relief and thankfulness, it seemed to bear away with it a crushing load and to leave him renewed and hopeful." The apostrophe to the "air-drawn dagger," as given by Macready, was a triumph of discrimination and emphasis. The transitions from amazement and awe to reviving reason—once more staggered by the growing force of his terrors, and again reasserting itself to dispel them—could not have been more judiciously marked. And yet—to me, at least—there seemed a want. Reasoning carried it over intuition; all had been too obviously reasoned out. The thoughts did not sufficiently hurry upon and partly confuse

each other, as they do in real tumults of the soul. The crouching form and stealthy, felon-like step of the self-abased murderer, as he quitted the scene, made, however, a picture not to be forgotten. In contrast with the erect, martial figure that entered in the first act, this change was the moral of the play made visible. The acting of Macready, after the murder, has been so generally extolled, that I rather state as a personal feeling than as a critical opinion that here again various mental states seemed too sharply defined and separated. The emotions of shame, terror, remorse, momentary despair, and selfish fear, might, I fancied, have more often flowed into each other, as when, in real life, some fatal act almost at the same moment excites and yet paralyzes apprehension by the sense that it is irretrievable. I thought of Hazlitt's description of Edmund Kean at this point. "The hesitation, the bewildered look, the coming to himself when he sees his hands bloody; the manner in which his voice clung to his throat and choked his utterance; his agony and tears, the force of nature overcome by passion — beggared description." Something of this I missed in Macready, though his entire performance was probably finer and more suggestive than that of Kean. But Macready's final waking to the full conviction of the gulf between the past and the present was one of his grandest moments. I still vividly recall the terrible agony of his cry—

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking; I would thou couldst!"

as, with his face averted from his wife, and his arms outstretched, as it were, to the irrecoverable past, she dragged him from the stage.

The entrance of Banquo's ghost in the third act gives an opportunity to a tragic actor of which Macready fully availed himself. His great merit, however, in this act, was the force with which he previously brought out the gnawings of conscience and the insecurity of ill-gotten power. In his haggard aspect, in his restless movements, it seemed as if the curse, "Macbeth shall sleep no more," had taken visible effect. What misery pierced through his hollow mirth when he exclaimed—

"But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,  
Ere we will eat our meal in fear,"

feigning so quickly followed by his tones of hopeless yearning in the words—

"Duncan is in his grave,  
After life's fitful fever *he* sleeps well."

When his wife questioned him as to Banquo, the furtive look with which he turned from the very partner of his crime bore terrible witness to the isolation of guilt. The sinister, ill-suppressed laugh which accompanied his answer—

"Be innocent of knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed!"

marked, I thought, a new and dreadful stage in the usurper's experience. What a revelation in the words, "*dearest chuck*"! She whose spirit had so dominated him in the early scenes was now his mere half-trusted accomplice. His misery had cast off awe; he was become grimly familiar with her. His much applauded transition in the last act, from the impetuous command to Seyton, "Give me mine armour," to the ultra-colloquial, "How does your patient,



doctor?" never appeared to me a beauty. It was a telling stage-contrast, but so extreme as to be factitious. His closing scenes could not have been surpassed. His physical energy was terrific, and took grandeur from the desperate mind. He turned upon Fate and stood at bay.

Comparing his Macbeth with his Hamlet, I retain to the last a preference for the latter, though even at the time I first saw it he scarcely looked the character. His tall figure, with its large and bold outlines, his brow, almost ample enough to be ponderous, hardly suggested the refined, pensive prince who was yet "the glass of fashion and the mould of form." And, indeed, Hamlet, as interpreted by this tragedian, was less the melancholy, musing Dane than he is generally represented. There was more of passion than of sentiment in the rendering. With Macready, the credulous faith, so bitterly dispelled, of the young optimist, was turned to gall. Thus, to the end of the third act, a tone of glowing excitement or of keen irony were the features of the embodiment. Except for a touch of melancholy tenderness for a lost ideal in Ophelia, or of the courtesy which his princely nature prescribed to his inferiors, Hamlet was, with him, a misanthrope. It was only when he had long writhed under the sense of human wrong and "the yoke of inauspicious stars" that his mind, driven back upon its early instinct of faith, grew patient and trustful, in spite of experience. "We defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. . . . The readiness is all." Conversing with a friend, he once observed, "In the early acts of 'Hamlet' I seek to express, among other things, the impetuous rebellion of a generous nature

when its trust has been cruelly deceived ; in the last act, the resignation of a generous nature when the storm has spent itself ;—in presenting the striking contrasts of this conception—its passion, its imagination, its irony, its colloquial realism.” On the appearance of the Ghost, his voice and manner so expressed a soul spellbound and set apart from men by a supernatural visitation as to hold the house breathless with awe. In the celebrated scene with Ophelia, true to his theory of the optimist turned pessimist, he was far more bitter than Charles Kemble or Charles Kean, yet the agony of his love pierced through the bitterness. In the closet-scene, though gentle at the close, he was sterner to his mother than were his stage contemporaries. His indictment of her was delivered with an arresting concentration that had nothing in it of violence or tumult, and with a mien lofty and unrelenting, as if he had been the commissioned angel of retribution. His acting in the play scene was superb. His answers to the King’s suspicious questions, as the play before the Court proceeds, were keen, glittering, and venomous, like the thrusts of a poisoned dagger. With body prone, and head erect, and eyes riveted on Claudius, he dragged himself nearer and nearer to him, till the moment of Gonzago’s murder, then sprang up to meet the convicted King, with a burst of mocking exultation. His performance abounded, moreover, with delicate and poetic suggestions. One of these was his way of quitting the stage at the end of the first act, after his interview with the Ghost. About to depart, he turned to Horatio and Marcellus, and saying, in a tone tender and hushed, “Nay, come, let’s go together,” led them off the stage. Being

at the same hotel with him in Manchester, I went into his room one night after returning from his performance of Hamlet. I remarked that this act of fellowship on the part of Hamlet had greatly struck me, as indicating the sense of brotherhood between man and man which the awe of a supernatural visitation would call forth. This comment pleased him. "It is one of those minute touches," he replied, "that an actor throws in only after long familiarity with a part. As to Hamlet, I believe no man ever played it with any approach to completeness until he was too old to look it."

His Othello, though some of the details were masterly, could not, I think, be considered a great success. His indignant passion was at times most powerful, but it was a passion into which the agony of deceived love too little entered. It was rather the cry of betrayed honour than of a tortured heart. Among his fine points was the thrusting of his dark, despairing face through the curtains of the bed when Emilia calls to him after Desdemona's murder. The discovery of the face alone—"the index to a tragic volume"—was thrilling in its effect, besides forming incidentally, in contrast with the drapery, a marvellous piece of colour. Macready may have had no misgivings as to the claims of his Othello, but I think he understood its comparative unpopularity. One morning, after the tragedy had been some days announced, he said to me in the theatre, with his smile of austere humour, "I am about to punish an undiscerning public. They will not see my Othello next week." A poor "let" had doubtless induced him to postpone it.

His Iago, on the other hand, was one of his most famous delineations. With absorbing self-love and the vindictiveness it engenders for its chief motives, was combined delight in evil activity of intellect. It was the knave's pastime with Macready to become, in appearance, "all things to all men"—bluntly faithful and disinterested with Othello, genial comrade with Cassio, loose gallant with Roderigo, amusing cynic with Desdemona. In some of these phases, though assumed only to further a dark purpose, an admirable vein of comedy was evinced.

His incidental touches of comedy in serious characters were, indeed, very characteristic and happy. Amongst these may be ranked, besides the hypocritical phases of Iago, his playful raillery of the love-struck Virginia, his downright soldierly frankness in Melantius, his easy gaiety with the players, his courtly but incisive irony towards the spies in Hamlet. In all characters that combined the keen perception of human meanness and inconsistency with social courtesy in expressing it, he was thoroughly at home. Thus his representation of Evelyn, with his clever cynicism, in Lord Lytton's "Money," was an incontestable success. He somewhat underrated, I think, the great opportunities which the part afforded him. "I should never have performed Evelyn," he said, "had it not been written by Bulwer."

In one celebrated character in Shaksperian comedy he gained a triumph which, in its way, might fairly rank with any that he achieved in tragedy. The character was that of Benedick, which he played for his benefit. In this part his spontaneous humour, especially in the scene where he resolves to marry, roused the house to

such shouts of mirth, one might have thought Keeley, not Macready, was on the stage. His Benedick differed widely from that of other well-known actors. Whether it was the truest rendering of the part may be doubted, but I have seen none more effective. In the various conflicts with Beatrice there was not that eagerness of repartee, that animated enjoyment of the wit combat, nor quite that polished address (though Macready was both the soldier and the gentleman) ascribed to Charles Kemble. Macready had rather a provokingly indulgent and half-careless air towards his fair enemy. He wore a somewhat *blasé* manner to her, as of one versed in the serious business of life, and a little cynical through experience, who, nevertheless, good-naturedly consented to trifle and *badiner* with a lady for her amusement, who sometimes forgets his light *rôle* in serious thought, and then, rousing himself, returns apologetically to his recreation. In the celebrated soliloquy in the second act, after he has overheard in the arbour that Beatrice loves him, the complex expression of his face as he advanced drew roars from the house before he uttered a word. One might read there the sense of amazement, of gratification, and of perplexity as to the way of reconciling his newly-revealed passion for Beatrice with his late raillery at her and all women. His amazement was less, even, that Beatrice loved him, than that (his suspicion deepening to conviction as the soliloquy went on) he responded to her love. He evidently remembered his own recent vaunt, "I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will, after he hath laughed at

such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love.' Accordingly, Macready, with great humour, made Benedick, in his first wish to be consistent, put his response to Beatrice rather upon the ground of pity and courtesy than of his own strong inclining: "Love me! why it must be requited. I hear how I am censured"—a shallow sophism to disguise his passion, which again called forth the heartiest mirth. His next step in reasoning, where he makes a moral aphorism the pretext for yielding to his inclinations, "Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending," was not a whit less effective. In fact, the humour of the position, from his first surprise and timid regard for his consistency to the defiant scorn of ridicule at the close, was splendidly brought out. The most specious argument acquired with him the force of reason, or, if not, his will dispensed with it. It was an unopposed march, in which the victor gains audacity as he takes outwork upon outwork, until he hoists his flag from the citadel.

The success of the tragedian in this brilliant comedy was complete; yet he had so much doubted of it beforehand, he said, that he had proposed resigning Benedick to Mr. Anderson after the first night. He had had, as we have seen, similar misgivings with respect to Iago, and, previously to resuming the part in London, had been wretched with the apprehension of failure. The acclamations of the audience and the verdict of the best critics on Benedick, which proved to be one of his finest impersonations, came upon him as a shock of pleasure.

Among Macready's triumphs his Werner holds



so high a place as to require some minuteness of detail. Of all his characters out of Shakspeare (and I do not forget Virginius or Melantius), Werner and Richelieu are those which most often recur to me. Amiable censors have not been wanting to allege that his success in Werner was chiefly due to the resemblance between the hero of the drama and himself in point of morbid pride and sensitiveness. This theory, however, by no means accounts for the impressive melancholy which he wore when Werner's honours were restored, or, above all, for that display of a father's love and agony in the fifth act, which must be ranked amongst his supreme effects. But to whatever cause his exhibition of pride and bitter, querulous impatience, in the first act, were due, it is hard to conceive of their being more intense and incisive. The rising of the curtain discovered the fugitive nobleman, indignant at his cruel fate, stalking to and fro like some captured wild animal in his cage. The gaunt look of recent sickness was in his face, the fretful irritability which it causes repeatedly broke forth, spite of his affection for his wife, in his tones and gestures; while, through the veil of poverty, disease, and mental suffering, gleamed a forlorn haughtiness of bearing which bespoke his ineradicable pride of birth. The quick apprehensions and suspicions which spring from nerves wasted alike with disease and grief were admirably conveyed, first, by his alarm when he hears the knocking of the Intendant, and again, by the air of feline wariness and distrust with which he scanned Gabor on his entrance and subsequently. At length Stralenheim enters, who seeks to usurp Werner's domain, and, for that evil end, to secure

his person. Werner at once recognizes him, and the former has at length a dim suspicion that the man before him is his intended victim. When at length Stralenheim turns to him, after conversing with the Intendant and Gabor, the furtive and apprehensive gaze with which Macready had watched his oppressor, gave way to irrepressible hatred. Nothing could be more curtly repellant than his tones, in answer to Stralenheim's questions—

“*Stral.* Have you been here long?

*Wer.* (*with abrupt surprise*).

Long?

*Stral.*

I sought

An answer, not an echo.

*Wer.* (*rapidly and morosely*). You may seek  
Both from the walls; I am not used to answer  
Those whom I know not.”

A little later, when Stralenheim observes, “Your language is above your station,” Werner’s answer, “*Is it?*” contained a transition from ironical humility to scorn and loathing, which it was surprising so brief a phrase could express. Not less striking, when he feared his passion might betray him, was the sudden change, in the words that follow, to rude and caustic indifference—

“’Tis well that it is not beneath it,

As sometimes happens to the better clad.”

In the second act, it will be remembered that Werner, made desperate by the plain suspicions of Stralenheim, who has power to arrest and imprison him, commits a robbery on his foe, in the dead of night, to gain the means of escape. Subsequently, Werner and his wife are discovered by their long-lost son, Ulric. The joy of the parents has scarcely found utterance when Ulric tells them that he had, on the previous day,

saved the life of Stralenheim, and that he is now in quest of the villain who had robbed him. To give any conception of Macready's acting at this point, I must quote the dialogue—

*Wer. (agitatedly).* Who

Taught you to mouth that name of 'villain?'

*Ulr.*

What

More noble name belongs to common thieves?

*Wer.* Who taught you thus to brand an unknown being  
With an infernal stigma?

*Ulr.*

My own feelings

Taught me to name a ruffian from his deeds.

*Wer.* Who taught you, long-sought and ill-found boy! that  
It would be safe for my own son to insult me?

*Ulr.* I named a villain. What is there in common  
With such a being and my father?

*Wer.*

Everything!

That ruffian is thy father.

*Jos.*

Oh, my son!

Believe him not—and yet!—(*her voice falters*).

*Ulr. (starts, looks earnestly at WERNER, and then says slowly).*

And you avow it?

*Wer.* Ulric! Before you dare despise your father,

Learn to divine and judge his actions. Young,

Rash, new to life, and reared in luxury's lap,

Is it for you to measure passion's force,

Or misery's temptation? Wait—(not long,

It cometh like the night, and quickly)—Wait!—

Wait till, like me, your hopes are blighted—till

Sorrow and shame are handmaids of your cabin;

Famine and poverty your guests at table;

Despair your bed-fellow—then rise, but not

From sleep, and judge! Should that day e'er arrive—

Should you see then the serpent who hath coiled

Himself around all that is dear and noble

Of you and yours, lie slumbering in your path,

With but *his* folds between your steps and happiness,

When *he*, who lives but to tear from you name,

Lands, life itself, lies at your mercy, with

Chance your conductor; midnight for your mantle

The bare knife in your hand, and earth asleep,

Even to your deadliest foe; and he, as 'twere,

Inviting death, by looking like it, while

His death alone can save you:—Thank your God!

If then, like me, content with petty plunder,

You turn aside—I did so!"

From the cry of remonstrance with which the above passage opens, even to its close, what a complexity of emotions struggling and, at the same time, blending with each other, did Macready portray! The strife between wrathful pride and agony, at having to confess and extenuate his guilt to his idolized and just-regained son; the increasing and, at last, breathless rapidity with which he piled up the circumstances of his desperate temptation and venial sin; till, finally, pride, self-abasement, and self-vindication were swallowed up and swept away by a master-touch of paternal love and anguish, as, shaken, convulsed, with extended arms and bowed head, he appealed to Ulric with the words, "*I did so;*"—all these, with their harrowing pathos and subduing power, live in my memory as if they were of yesterday. More than forty years have not weakened their effect.

The bald tale, in the third act, of Stralenheim's murder by an unknown hand, of Werner's dread lest he should be suspected of the crime, and of his escape from the spot, supply little that is of dramatic interest. The fourth act, also, which shows Werner restored to his estates and to his title of Count Siegendorf, moves slowly and eventlessly, though the sense of heartsick grief for unrequited affection could not have found more faithful expression than in the scene where the restored Count bewails the coldness of the son in whom his every hope was centred. His grief here had low and level tones, as if it had gradually sapped and well-nigh exhausted the active force of emotion. There was a forlornness, a vain, wasting craving in his look, a restlessness which his brave robes as Count seemed to in-

tensify by contrast. The fifth act, however, brings the great situation of the tragedy. In his disguise as Werner, before flying, after Stralenheim's death, Count Siegendorf had, it will be remembered, met Gabor, a Hungarian. He has deeply suspected this man of being Stralenheim's murderer. At the celebration of a national festival in Prague, he has seen him in the crowd. Soon afterwards the supposed criminal, instead of avoiding detection, repairs to the Count's mansion and demands to see him. He is admitted, and answers Siegendorf's charge of murder by accusing Ulric of it, who is present. The Count, drawing, rushes on Gabor with fierce indignation, then turns from him with incredulous disdain. The latter, however, proceeds with his story. What Macready achieved here in the way of facial expression and symbolic gesture (for his share in the dialogue was small), has never, I think, under the given condition, been exceeded. At first, with one arm thrown fondly round his son's shoulder, he listened with light scorn to his accuser. As the proofs thickened, the eyes, before careless, became fixed on Gabor. This man related particular after particular, the fearful significance of which against his son the Count at length recognized, while the relaxed arm which lay on Ulric's shoulder fell heavily. As Gabor proceeded, and with increasing stress of proof, the Count turned and looked at his son. Shocked by his expression, he faltered a step from him. The tale continued, and again the stricken father unconsciously fell back. His changes of look and attitude had silently told all the effects of the story upon the sympathizing spectators.

As I have said, the words allotted here to Mac-

ready were few and far between; but there was little need of words. The changes in the father's heart were uttered in a tongue of which every movement was a syllable, every look an accent.

At length Gabor retires, and Count Siegendorf is left alone with Ulric, who not only confesses the murder, but urges the "silencing of Gabor." While the father lies horror-struck in his chair, Ulric proceeds to explain and defend his crime in slaying Stralenheim. When the Count answers him with expressions of grief and abhorrence, Ulric retorts thus—

"If *you* condemn me, yet  
Remember *who* hath taught me, once too often,  
To listen to him! *Who* proclaimed to me  
That *there were crimes made venial by the occasion?*"

The greatness of Macready's acting here reached its climax. As Ulric cited the fatal doctrine of expediency, by which Siegendorf had extenuated his robbery in the second act, the feeling that his own maxims and example had betrayed his son into crime was fearfully expressed by the convulsions of the face, by the hands, that first sought to close the ears, and then to beat back the fatal sounds that would enter. When at length Ulric, in plain terms, charges his disgrace upon his father's precepts, Macready produced one of those rare effects which become traditions of the theatre. With a shrill cry of agony, as if pierced mortally by a dart, he bounded from his seat, and then, as if all strength had failed him, wavered and fluttered forward, so to speak, till he sank on one knee in front of the stage.\*

\* Mr. Macready was succeeded in his great performance of Werner by Mr. Phelps, who played the character with considerable effect during his management of Sadler's Wells. Since then, Werner remained unrepresented by any adequate



How various are the characters, some of them especially identified with him, which the name of this great artist recalls;—in Shakspeare, Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, King John, Henry the Fourth, Iago, Iachimo, Prospero, Benedick, the Fifth Harry, with his impetuous chivalry, Brutus, with his placid self-devotion, his long forbearance with Cassius, his noble and tender fortitude in Portia's loss, and his indulgent care for his drowsy attendant; in the general drama, Melantius, in "The Bridal," the soul of honour, Virginius, the father-priest, Richelieu, wily, imperious, patriotic, Ion, the antique type of youth in its beauty and self-sacrifice, Claude Melnotte, the modern type of youth in its bright credulity and passionate impulse. If, as has been said, he was in this last character here and there a little too weighty and tragic, the wonder yet was that at his years, and with his serious bias, his performance was on the whole so elastic, flexible, and spirited.

Of the qualities to which Macready owed his eminence, the highest and most remarkable were his psychological insight and his artistic power of translating his emotions into strikingly appropriate—often absolutely symbolic—forms of expression. If it be granted that one or two tragedians have, in some parts, excelled him in the sudden revelations of passion, it is yet probable that he has never been excelled, if equalled,

actor, until it was revived by Mr. Henry Irving, on June 1, 1887, for the benefit of the present writer, with a sympathetic generosity that has scarcely a parallel in theatrical annals. The pathetic watchfulness of the father absorbed in his son, and the overpowering climax of paternal agony when Ulric's unworthiness is at length discovered, have been recorded with due appreciation and delight by other pens than that of the writer.

in the complete and harmonious development of character. In all his great impersonations was shown the same faculty of grasping the central idea of his part, and of making all the lights thrown upon details correspond with that idea. What has already been said of his Lear, Hamlet, and Macbeth, will suggest how finely the faculty just referred to was evinced in these impersonations. His King John furnishes another marked example. Before practising for Arthur's death, the Usurper was still a Plantagenet, haughty and martial in bearing, swift and bold in decision. After the abasement of instigating murder, the whole bearing of the man changed; the former knight had caught something of the dogged, covert look, the bowed form, the stealthy gait of the assassin. When, in the fifth act, Faulconbridge attempts to rekindle the spirit of the soldier in John, his answer, in feeble, disheartened tones, "Have *thou* the ordering of this present time," was "a whole history." Dignity and will had forsaken him. Except in remorse, he was a Plantagenet no more.\*

\* In the revival of "King John," in 1841, Macready introduced a new effect. After the fight in the third act, which results in an English victory, a part of the English force crossed the stage, preceded by trumpeters, who sounded notes of melancholy and wailing. One night, at Macready's house, Mr. W. J. Fox objected that sounds of this kind could not with propriety have proceeded from the triumphant English, the retreat alluded to in the stage directions being clearly that of the French. Macready answered that the purpose of these notes was to prepare the house for King John's sinister interview with Hubert, which immediately followed. On being asked for my opinion—that of a very young man—by two who were greatly my seniors, I was diplomatic enough to observe that the question seemed to be how far a dramatic effect, finely suggestive, might be purchased at the expense of probability.

An instance of his subtle blending of the chief motives of a part with its national features, was to be found in his Shylock, where the Jew's traditional reverence for law, and belief in its inviolability, were emphasized in his delineation: "I stand for judgment; answer, shall I have it?" "If you deny me, fie upon your law." "I crave the law." "I charge you by the law." "You know the law; your exposition hath been most sound." "Is that the law?"

The power of expressing states of feeling by gesture and attitude is, of course, necessary to every actor. With Macready it rose into a special endowment. Take two more examples of this, the first from Gerald Griffin's almost forgotten play of "Gisippus," produced at Drury Lane. On discovering that his betrothed, whom he passionately loves, is really attached to his friend, Gisippus, after a struggle, resigns her to him. The marriage day comes, and Gisippus, suppressing his emotion, mingles with the guests. At length the affianced pair move on to the bridal. At this point Macready lingered behind, sank upon a bench, and, as the music grew fainter, took off his chaplet, gazed on it wistfully, mournfully; then, with bowed head, let it fall, with a sigh. The wreath seemed to drop on the grave of his illusions.

My next recollection is of an opposite kind; it is that of his towering, scornful attitude, as Spinola, in "Nina Sforza," when, in the fifth act, with foot and sword, he turned over the limbs of the prostrate rival—his house's foe—whose despair and ruin he had accomplished. The intense malignity of the action last named excited the opposition of the pit, but it was true

to the hereditary hatred of the character, which, with its duplicity, had been superbly rendered throughout.

Amongst the sources of this artist's inspiration, was that reverential and religious sentiment to which so many pages of his diary bear witness—a sentiment which, in poetical natures, begets a deep sense of the supernatural. Macready had evidently felt deeply the strange contrasts of human life—its mournful transiency, and its persistent love; its seal of mortality, and its far-extending dreams; the darkness, without revelation, that engirds it, and the yearning, dim, but ennobling, that points to a lot higher than its apparent one. Thus, the "Out, out, brief candle!" of Macbeth; Hamlet's fascinated awe before the form that, "in complete steel, revisited the glimpses of the moon," and his baffled conjecture as to the "undiscovered country;" the solemn farewell of Brutus to Cassius—

"If we do meet again, why, we shall smile;  
If not, why then this parting was well made;"

—all these took from Macready's lips and look a pathetic awe that penetrated and subdued the hearer. Again, the closing lines of Richelieu, now regrettably omitted—

"No; let us own that there is One, above,  
Who sways the harmonious mysteries of the world  
Far better than prime ministers. So ends it,"

were delivered by him, on the first night, with a submissive reverence in striking contrast with his recent bearing as the proud and victorious minister.

In general, he may be said to have excelled in characters and situations where intellect and

passion set off each other, as in Lear, rather than in those in which passion largely predominated—in the satire which springs from embittered feeling and in emotional thought, especially when it touches upon mystery and speculation. Hence much of the excellence of his Hamlet. He was at home in finesse and strategy, and in all that involved intellectual gladiatorship, as in Iago and Richelieu. Combativeness in any aspect had a charm for him. Thus his finest act in "Macbeth" was the last, in which the usurper is at bay. He was seldom more effective than in characters of forlorn pride, where the dignity or haughtiness of the man has to pierce through his mean fortunes, as in Werner. In portraying the domestic affections, he shone more as the father than as the lover or the husband. He was not, to my thinking, at his best in characters chiefly contemplative, like Jacques. On rare occasions he was liable, as in parts of "Macbeth," to suppress impulse by over-elaboration of design. His transitional contrasts of voice, though at times very telling, were often artificial. His delivery, though most clear and expressive in passages of emotion, was occasionally dragging and spasmodic—a defect probably owing to his advancing asthma; while, to miss none of his peculiarities, he had, in moments of repose, a monotonous proneness to standing in the same posture—one knee, a little bent, before the other.

Among those contemporaries in tragedy with whom I had a chance of comparing him—I was too young to see Edmund Kean or John Kemble—he was *facile princeps*. Neither Charles Kemble nor Charles Kean approached him in imagination or—until the latter left ideal for photographic art

—in breadth of execution.\* In both respects Vandenhoff was no less his inferior. Where his way was clear, this last performer had decisiveness of outline and force of style; but he lacked Macready's subtlety and refinement. In these respects, Butler, who had, undoubtedly, passion and physical power, was far behind him. Phelps, after his *début* in London, had, to a great extent, founded himself upon Macready, and in his tragic impersonations, with a few exceptions—Hamlet and Othello, for instance—followed him closely and often impressively, though wanting something of his vigour. As to Edmund Kean, though unable to speak of him from personal knowledge, I cannot doubt from general testimony, that, in the exhibition of passion, he was a more inspired actor than Macready. That wild agony of Othello, that ever flies from, and still encounters love; Richard's fiendish cunning and heartlessness, and his desperate energy of will in the fight where he "enacted more wonders than a man;" Shylock's alternations of grief and revenge, as the thought of his daughter's flight and the hope of Antonio's ruin seize him by turns,—these, by all accounts, received from Kean that sudden and terrible illumination which made Coleridge liken its effect to "reading Shakspeare by flashes of lightning." I should not, therefore, hesitate to acknowledge Edmund Kean's superiority to any male performer of his time, since so absolutely to identify himself—if only in certain scenes—with the passions of a human being as to reproduce their most vital manifestations, is, so far, not only to represent, but to *be*, the man.

\* In the latter respect Charles Kean's Hamlet was an exception.



Yet a sharp line of division between such men as the elder Kean and Macready should be avoided. In harmony of design, and in purely intellectual qualifications generally, the latter had evidently the advantage; while in characters that touched some secret of his own personality, such as Richelieu or Werner, Macready must have approached the spontaneous and life-like intensity of Kean. Regarding, in addition to his wide command of emotion, the depth of his conceptions, the clearness of his outlines, his width of range, his suggestive imagination, and his power of giving to feelings and ideas striking expression in outward form, Macready, whether compared with his contemporaries or his predecessors, may probably be ranked as the most intellectual of British actors. His death took place in April, 1873, at the age of eighty.

## CHAPTER IV.

## MR. CHARLES KEMBLE.

A summer evening at the West End, in the season of 1835—Charles Kemble's Hamlet, at the Haymarket—Cast of the tragedy—Charles Kemble's appearance and manner—Description of his Hamlet—His return to the stage in 1840, by command of Her Majesty—Account of his Mercutio in "Romeo and Juliet"—His readings at Willis's Rooms, in 1844—Account of his Faulconbridge in "King John," and his reading of that play generally—Presence of the Queen Dowager—Personal acquaintance with Charles Kemble—Various fireside readings—Shylock—Richard the Third—His tragic recitations generally—Resolution not to attempt John Kemble's parts, with the exception of Hamlet, till his brother retired—Contrast of Charles Kemble's style with that of Macready, and (by report) of the elder Kean—His private readings or recitations in comedy—A gentleman of the old school in private—Dignity of his manner and appearance—His conversation generally serious, with occasional passages of humour—Anecdote of his brother John—Dispute as to the intelligence of a popular actor—A test-prologue written for his recitation—The prologue in question—Mr. Kemble's deafness and habit of making his confidences aloud—Anecdotes illustrative of this—His Epicurean tastes—Talk on the drama—Suggestion of plots—A domestic story—The reign of Henry the Second—Mr. David Roberts, R.A.—Mexico and Montezuma—General estimate of C. Kemble as an actor—Leigh Hunt's testimony on his retirement—His minuteness of treatment often unfavourable to passion—Mrs. Siddons on his Jaffier—General admiration of his Mark Antony—John Oxenford on the consistency of his characterization, instanced in Charles Surface—Charles Kemble's death, at the age of seventy-nine.

AN evening in the summer of 1835 still lives

distinctly in my memory. It was the height of the season, and when, between five and six o'clock, I found myself in Piccadilly, opposite the Green Park (having probably made my way to this point from the grand old trees of Kensington Gardens), the road was still crowded with lines of carriages and equestrians bound to or returning from Hyde Park. To a lad's eye the scene was, of course, enchanting. How delightful the fresh green of the trees, the brightness of the evening, the effects of sunlight on harness or emblazoned panel, or the glimpse of grace and beauty as some fair Amazon dashed by. Then, on nearing Regent Street, how brilliant the shops with their glittering windows, where more than the treasures of an Eastern bazaar were displayed. These, with the shops of Regent Street itself, had probably offered me many temptations to linger, to say nothing of an episodic seduction in the shape of the Burlington Arcade, with its cool, mysterious shade, its treasures of French nick-nacks, its fascinations in haberdashery, its imitation jewellery, and its autographed likenesses of reigning celebrities in opera and ballet. At any rate, it was more than half-past six when I sauntered down the Haymarket. The carriages at the box entrance of the theatre were discharging their occupants, the crowd at the pit had already entered. Charles Kemble was to play Hamlet.

I had, doubtless, previously been aware of this, but, most likely because the actor's fame had been chiefly associated with elegant comedy, the announcement of his Hamlet had inspired me with no especial interest. At the door of the theatre, however, the thought seized me that he was the

brother of Siddons, and of that John Kemble whose portrait in Hamlet, by Lawrence, had filled me with many regrets that I had never seen the original. To see Charles Kemble in Hamlet, would be to see, in tragedy, the last of the old Kemble trio, who, though falling short in public estimation of his brother and still more renowned sister, was now their sole male heir and representative—of one blood with them, so to speak, in art as well as in life.\*

These considerations determined me to witness the performance. So I passed, by the familiar door that had often tempted me, into the pit. Soon the overture ceased, and the curtain rose. Mrs. Glover was the Queen, Mr. Strickland, Polonius, Mr. Cooper, the Ghost, and Miss Taylor (afterwards Mrs. Walter Lacy), Ophelia.

When at length the King, Queen, Hamlet, and the Court had entered, I felt at once, even before a sound had issued from the lips of the melancholy Prince, that in some essential points my best expectations would be realized. Though surrounded by good and accomplished actors, there was in Charles Kemble's look, attitude, and movement, a charm which, if sad, was so noble and full of repose as to distinguish him from his associates. He was then sixty, and of too massive a presence for his character; but he well counterfeited the suavity and dignity, if not the form and features, of princely youth. His step was stately without being pompous; it had the stateliness of one "to the manner born." When at length he spoke, the perfect modulation

\* Years later, on her return to the stage, I witnessed the representations of his daughter (then Mrs. Butler), who so well maintained the honours of her line.

of his tones, except occasionally when reaching to a high note (in passion he more than once "piped"), was enchanting. Study, of course, there was in all this, perhaps over-study, though the art of concealing art had, in a great measure, been mastered. I was, however, then too young to be minutely critical,\* and surrendered myself with delight to the harmony of the representation. I had never imagined there could be so much charm in words as mere sounds. Next, I was caught by a graceful, pensive idling with those quibbles of the brain in which Hamlet first indulges, that made them seem tricks of fence to ward off approach to his deeper nature. Though they had their touch of causticity, they were thrown off with an air of courtly ease and respect widely different from the intense and scornful significance employed by some actors, who have thus disclosed, at the very outset of the play, Hamlet's loathing for the King. Charles Kemble's fine instinct taught him the unseemliness of launching bitter sarcasms at Claudius before his courtiers. The subdued and delicate irony of his manner might be understood by those whose guilt gave the key to it. To the rest it was the mere humour of the moment, or play upon words. When the Court breaks up and Hamlet is left alone, the soliloquy beginning—

"Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt!"

I have since more than once heard rendered with greater bitterness, with more passionate denunciation of the Queen's inconstancy, with

\* Of course, with respect to Mr. Charles Kemble, and every other performer treated of in my series, I record my early judgments only so far as they have been confirmed and matured by experience.

a fiercer recoil from the King, but, never, I think, with so much pathetic beauty. There was, of course, indignation, but the predominant note was that of melancholy. You heard a wail over human instability, conveyed by a music of delivery which, skilfully varied in its tones, insinuated, rather than forced its way, and made sorrow lovely :—

“ Why, she would hang on him,  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on ! And yet, within a month,—  
Let me not think on’t ;—Frailty, thy name is woman ! ”

These last words seemed to float away in a very melody of sadness. The fitful and wilder grief that preceded them had sunk into a sigh. While unable at that time to recognize the art which produced this effect, I was deeply conscious of the effect itself. Beauty of treatment, indeed (as contrasted with what is commonly known as power of treatment, though beauty has, of course, its own power), was the feature of the performance. In Hamlet's apostrophe to the Ghost, what beauty of attitude, of tones, which, though subdued and awe-struck, yet found scope for variety. When Horatio and Marcellus would fain restrain him from following the spectre, what grace mingled with the energy of his struggles, how picturesque was his figure, how fraught with filial trust and reverence ! There was about him an air of elevation and trust in his spiritual visitant when he broke from his companions, which seemed to speak him of a different and higher nature—as one who had kinship with supernatural life which they might not comprehend. The house sat breathless to see him glide off after his father's spirit, which



magnetically and irresistibly drew him. To criticise fully a representation almost embarrassingly rich in delicate and subtle detail, would be impossible within the limits of this notice. Passing, then, to his scene with Ophelia, of which I yet recall the charm—the melancholy, tender portrayal of a noble soul's distrust, striving with its love, overcome by it, then reasserting itself to the close in despair that yet idolized, in irresistible but mournful upbraidings, blended and harmonized with fond though vain yearnings—at the risk of being charged with fine writing, which every writer nowadays incurs, who introduces an image from nature into criticism, I will venture to say that this scene vividly suggested to me a shore at ebb-tide, now bare, now for a moment revisited, even flooded, by the returning wave, which, as it once more recedes, chimes its own plaintive, lingering farewell.

I had not seen "Hamlet" performed before, so that I could not then contrast Charles Kemble's rendering with any other. But, from larger experience, I am bound to say that the play-scene was not given with all the breadth and fire of which it is capable. The under-meanings, however, in the answers to the King and Queen could scarcely have been better conveyed; they were polished, but keen as arrows; while for those fierce and ringing tones of exultation which I heard later from Macready, when the King and Queen hurry from the stage, was substituted a conflict of indignation with grief, which, aided by the actor's grace of delivery and princely bearing, captivated rather than excited the house. His manner subsequently of rebuking the spies was unsurpassed by any I have witnessed. His sar-

casms, though given incisively, were so free from violence, and his disdain had such lofty quietude and such a suggestion of melancholy at the worldliness and insincerity of men, as to reconcile the displeasure of the Prince with elevation both of manner and feeling.

In the closet-scene with his mother, grief and filial tenderness prevailed, perhaps unduly, over the sternness which, however restrained, should still, I think, be in the ascendant; but the noble passages with which the scene abounds gave rare opportunities for the display of an elocution so finished that its art seemed nature. In the scene at Ophelia's grave—though it lacked the overmastering impulse of Macready—the same excellence of elocution was exhibited with great effect; but what I liked still better in later years (when I heard Charles Kemble *read* "Hamlet") was the tender beauty of the churchyard scene, and his vein of wandering reverie when he followed the quaint, half-humorous speculations of the part with such nice perception as never to disturb the prevailing gravity which they relieved. He was, indeed, a proficient in the display of graceful melancholy, and in the art of enhancing its effect by momentary reliefs of fancy. In the fifth act, his manner of rallying from weighty cares to accommodate himself to the fantastic levities of Osric, his perfect, most musical delivery of the meditative passages to Horatio; subsequently, his "gentle" bearing in the fencing scene with Laertes—the smiling, subdued grace of one only conscious of "the yoke of inauspicious stars," and the tender beauty of his dying,—fitly and softly led to the sleep which "rounded" his princely life.

He may be said to have realized those aspects

of the character—its pervading grace, with its contrasts of impetuosity and inaction, of pensiveness and passion, of amiability and irony, all harmonized and made lifelike—which, a few years since, were described by an accomplished critic,\* when noticing Mr. Edwin Booth, in language worthy of Hazlitt.

In depth of conception, and in power of rendering, Charles Kemble's Hamlet was inferior to Macready's, which, on the other hand, it excelled in the qualities that endear and charm. As I left the theatre and walked thoughtfully home, it seemed to me as if Hamlet's death had something in common with the night into which the sweet day had merged—a lingering twilight, with the soft mournfulness and tender repose that enchant more than brightness. Hamlet, indeed, was the one Shaksperian character in tragedy in which the excellence of the actor was unanimously admitted. I fancy, however, that he conceived himself to be, above all things, a tragedian; though accident had led him to seek distinction chiefly in comedy. One night, many years after the performance I have just chronicled, he had been reading at my house some scenes from "Richard the Third." Laying aside the book, he observed, in answer to our thanks, "The fame of my brother John in tragedy caused me for long to avoid trespassing upon his ground. To give up Hamlet, however, would have been a sacrifice beyond me."

When, after his retirement, he returned to the

\* Mr. Charles Dunphie, who, in his original poems, his felicitous renderings of English into Latin verse, and in several volumes of original essays, has shown not only rare refinement, humour, and keen perception, but a sympathy, under the veil of irony, with right and goodness, which are no less calculated to delight than to attach his readers.

stage for a few nights, in 1840, by command of Her Majesty, I had the pleasure of witnessing his Mercutio. Anderson was the Romeo, Miss Emmeline Montague, the Juliet, Mrs. C. Jones—a good actress of the Mrs. Glover type, though much her inferior in subtlety of characterization—the Nurse.

The spontaneousness of Charles Kemble's Mercutio struck his audience at once. The art that conceals art had done its work to perfection. Besides that ease and distinction which set him apart, even from actors conventionally graceful and spirited, there was in Kemble that freshness which arises when an actor seems to speak from the impulse of the moment, and when his utterances are apparently as fresh to himself as to the listener. Thus in the delivery of the speech describing Queen Mab, the first line—

“Oh, then, I see, Queen Mab hath been with you,”

was uttered without a touch of formal rhetoric or *pose*—by no means as a prelude to a set description, but as a simple, whimsical thought springing from mere buoyancy of heart. The thought uttered, you saw that it gave birth to another equally unpremeditated—

“She is the fairies’ midwife, and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate stone;”

until, pursuing the image, he had described her journey—

“Athwart men’s noses as they lie asleep.”

Then came another sudden burst of fancy, born of the first, gaining fresh strength and impetus in its course, till the speaker abandoned himself

to the brilliant and thronging illustrations which, amidst all their rapidity and fire, never lost the simple and spontaneous grace of nature in which they took rise. Mercutio's overflow of life, with its keen, restless enjoyment, was embodied with infectious spirit. There was no gall. If he was betrayed into a duel of words with Tybalt, it was even more by the love of excitement than by enmity; if he was betrayed into the indulgence of ridicule, it was the spirit of mirthful humour that overcame him. I have seen Mercutios derisively cruel in their banter of the Nurse. With Charles Kemble it was the sport of the encounter that drew him on. He assumed a grave, though somewhat exaggerated, courtesy towards the "ancient lady," as if to mask his ridicule from her, while enhancing it towards his comrades. It was only as the jest wore to its close that his enjoyment overmastered him, and showed him as a "saucy merchant" to the offended domestic. It was less malice than the same keen love of excitement that prompted him to quarrel. Even in his last encounter with Tybalt, the crowning provocation was the imagined wound that his friend's honour had received by his "dishonourable submission." It was, again, this full-blooded impulse that angered him with the elaborate and tutored fencing and affected airs of Tybalt—"a villain that fights by the book of arithmetic."

No description can well convey the force and the varied significance which the comedian gave to the scene in which Mercutio is slain. How startling was the former's change of tone after he deemed Romeo disgraced by his forbearance with Tybalt! No more the reckless light-hearted

aptness for the stimulant of quarrel, but the stern, swift scorn, the lightning-like retaliation of one whose heart has been pierced, whose person and cause have been humiliated in his friend. Scarcely has Tybalt parried the furious thrust, when Romeo's intervention gives him his chance, and Mercutio has his mortal wound. "I am hurt," he exclaims, at first scarcely realizing his disaster; then, feeling its deadly effect, "A plague o' both the houses!—I am sped:"—with a sudden self-upbraiding, as if he asked why he had let senseless feuds come between him and the exulting joy of life. And yet, soon after this, with a quaint, comic touch of expression, that said, the jade, Fate, *will* play men such tricks, "Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch; marry, 'tis enough!" How fine was it, next, to note the *bonhomie*, the old love of jest struggling with, and for a moment subduing, the pains of death, in the answer to Romeo's encouragement—"No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but it is enough. . . . Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man."

Here, having achieved this quip, there was a bright, though quickly fading smile. He was still the Mercutio of old—the gay, rash, loyal, boon-companion. It was a smile to call up tears, it conjured up so much of youth and the merry past, while it was well-contrasted and kept within reality by the brief techiness, still not unmingled with humour, that succeeded—"What! a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death!"—and by the reproof to Romeo for his fatal coming between—a reproof nobly and pathetically redeemed by the loving courtesy with



which he held out his hand to him, a moment after, in token of full forgiveness—a point which was, I believe, original with Charles Kemble, and which has since become an acting tradition of the character. Then there came a deep, wistful expression into his face, reminding you of Romeo's strange avowal to the Nurse—I am not sure that it is spoken on the stage—that he was “one whom God had made himself to mar”—and that there were higher possibilities in the Mercutio of this brief, bright, tragic story, than had ever come to light; but it is too late, said the look; let us wind up with a jest, though it be a grim one—“A plague o’ both your houses!”

Such was the impression I have retained of this noble performance, though, as in the case of Hamlet, it is not easy to say how far the subsequent effects of private or public readings and of conversation may have entered into and matured my first acquaintance with it. My *general* estimate of it, however, was the same from the beginning.

Hamlet and Mercutio were the only characters in which I saw Mr. Charles Kemble on the stage. I afterwards heard him read, at Willis's Rooms, part of a series of plays, which included several of his chief Shaksperian impersonations. These were “Hamlet,” “King John,” “As You Like It,” “King Henry IV.,” Part I., “Julius Cæsar,” “The Merchant of Venice,” “Macbeth,” “Romeo and Juliet,” and “King Richard III.”

In this list, though it included my favourite, “Hamlet,” no play had more attraction for me than “King John,” which contained Fauleonbridge—one of Kemble's most celebrated characters. He had evidently modelled his conception of the

part upon the fact that Faulconbridge was the son of Richard the "Lion-hearted." As this actor portrayed him, he might have well stood for Richard himself, with the addition, perhaps, of a dashing carelessness and license springing from the consciousness that his illegitimacy had at once given him an illustrious father, and yet left him free from all bonds of kindred, save those he imposed upon himself. The intrepidity, the love of danger and frolic, the occasional penetration and sagacity of Richard, and his martial bearing (with, besides, the untaught grace and freedom of a barbarian chief), were all embodied in this Faulconbridge, who had an air of unbounded enjoyment of life, which reflected King Richard's love of adventure even in excess.

It is hard to convey an impression, to those who have not seen him, of his delivery of the dialogue—hard to express the wide difference between his Faulconbridge and the renderings of other actors, who have delivered the text with spirit and just appreciation, and yet fallen so far short of Charles Kemble as to put comparison out of the question. The secret of his superiority lay, perhaps, in the fulness of life which seemed to radiate from him—to make war a gay pastime, diplomacy a play of wit, and to clothe worldliness itself with a glow of bright, genial satire. Thus the celebrated speech on "commodity," the raillery of Austria, and the sagacious counsel to England and France to unite against the defiant city of Angiers, were given with zest and ardour that were resistlessly contagious. This impersonation, in a word, seemed to blend the spirit of Mercutio with those of the warrior and the statesman. His

Constance had the great merit of harmonizing the invectives of the afflicted mother with the dignity of her high station. Except in the hands of a fine artist, Constance is apt to become either too sentimental or too shrewish. His King John abounded in minute and skilful touches, the great scene with Hubert exhibiting the advances of the tempter with the nicest gradations; but he did not bring home to me, as Macready did, the descent of the Plantagenet into the assassin. This, like most of his readings, was distinguished by a stateliness of expression peculiar to the Kembles, which I have also seen exhibited in the powerful and intellectual performances of his daughter, Mrs. Fanny Kemble. The series of readings attracted audiences which included much that was most refined and intellectual in the London of that day. On the night of "King John," the simultaneous rising of the company greeted the entrance of a personage equally loved and revered, Adelaide, the Queen Dowager.

In 1848, many years after witnessing Charles Kemble's Hamlet at the Haymarket, I had the pleasure of knowing him personally. He would occasionally gratify me and my family, and perhaps a chosen friend or two, by reading scenes from his principal characters at my own fireside. His selections were sometimes grave or tragic. He read, or rather, recited, various scenes of "Shylock" and of "Richard the Third," not only with the nice and finished detail and varied delivery of which he was always master, but with abundance of fire, the lack of which had at times been urged against the male Kembles. The first soliloquy of Richard, when

Duke of Gloucester, touching the defects of his person, he declaimed with a bitterness of irony which brought them into the strongest relief as motives of character. In this opening soliloquy, he urged, Shakspeare meant to give the key-note of Richard's nature, and to make his deformity, acting upon a sensitive spirit, the source of his misanthropy and remorselessness. He showed, too, remarkable physical energy, though it must, of course, be granted that a degree of power very telling in a drawing-room might be far less so on the stage.

This remark is called for because it has been alleged that his voice was unequal to the demand of passion. As to the possession of mental qualifications for tragedy, these social readings or recitals furnished ample proof. They were the more startling because, with the exception of his Hamlet, Charles Kemble's fame rested upon his successes in legitimate comedy.

In his tragic recitations the dignity of the Kembles fully asserted itself. His style in passion was uniformly lofty. There was variety, indeed—a nice discrimination of emotional changes relieving each other; but it was a variety confined within the limits of what may be called heroic delivery, seldom or never a marked transition from it to colloquial realism. The manner, maintained at the height of the feeling, made no such appeals to the many as did Macready and, according to report, Edmund Kean, by those familiar touches which, at times, set before an audience the individual rather than the typical man. I am not praising Charles Kemble for this habitual loftiness in tragedy. There are times

when abrupt changes, failing, confused utterance—touches of realistic infirmity, in a word—convey passion even by their partial inadequacy to express it. It may, however, be said that the heroic school somewhat atones for what it misses by its charm of elevation, while its disciples are generally free from those extravagant contrasts between the ideal and the familiar which is the besetting weakness of realists. To “raise a mortal to the skies” has never, in modern times, been so popular an attempt in art as to “draw an angel down;” but the poet has justly implied that almost equal praise is due to each kind of effort.

As to comedy, his rendering of such scenes as those between Orlando and Rosalind, and Benedick and Beatrice, mingled so happily refinement and delicacy with mirth and spirit, that the mental palate delighted in the selectness of the treat. It was the *grand vin* of comedy, while in sally and repartee there was the nicest precision and point, which yet seemed spontaneous, and a vein of light but ceremonious courtesy in the strife which suggested the grace of accomplished fencers as well as the glitter of the foils.

In society Mr. Charles Kemble was a model of the gentleman of the old school. His bow, though it might now be called formal, was stately and impressive. His dignity of manner and his tall figure, somewhat massive in his later years, gave him eminently that quality which is called “presence,” and which we somehow connect more closely with a bygone period than with our own. It seemed a wrong to Mr. Charles Kemble’s person that he did not, off the stage, wear knee-breeches, silk stockings, and diamond buckles, and that he

had survived the time of powdered hair. His conversation was generally grave, but he delighted to hear or relate a good anecdote or story, and, on such occasions, displayed the hearty enjoyment of humour which had done so much for him as a comedian. As an instance, I give the following anecdote which he related one day after dinner, touching his brother John.

John Kemble, he said, was generally supposed to be a grave and rather austere man, but he had, in fact, real appreciation of fun. A favourite brother-actor had one day been dining with him, and talk of old times had wrought John to such a pitch of hospitality that he was moved to produce a bottle of rare port, which he had so much valued that he could seldom bear to diminish his stock by drinking it. He did this port—which had, of course, a particular seal—the honour of going in quest of it himself. In due time he emerged from the cellar into the dining-room, with a bottle of the precious liquid, bearing, apparently, the identifying seal. The wine did not, of course, undergo the profanation of decanting, but the two glasses were solemnly filled from the black bottle. The contents being sipped, there was, of course, that brief, decorous silence which the criticism of a noble vintage demanded. The guest at length observed that it was truly a remarkable wine, and had a flavour all its own. The host assented, but fancied, at the same time, it didn't quite tally with the port in question, and, though by the seal it must have been the same, had not the smoothness he expected. The guest civilly answered that it had a great deal of life and fine colour, and, holding his glass to the light, speculated as to whether its peculiar sweet-



ness came from its extreme age. This conjecture John Kemble, whose palate, perhaps, lacked its usual fineness of discrimination, did not feel called upon to discuss; but he owned the "sweetness" was surprising, and that he greatly missed the "smoothness." Then a suspicion—fast deepening—dawned on him that there might have been a mistake. He at length admitted that he could hardly have brought up the port he went in search of. His guest, however, who was rapidly improving his acquaintance with it, maintained that it was capital stuff. The cautious tragedian, jealous for the honour of his port, confessed that the drink before them was not bad, but declared that it was not the wine he had promised; then more boldly asserted that, in his opinion, it was not wine at all. A portion of dark pulp, perhaps, floating with the beverage into his glass, had helped him to recollect that his cellar had lately received the addition of some few bottles of a *liqueur*. "Why, it's CHERRY BRANDY!" he exclaimed. This point Charles Kemble made with all the force of a climax in comedy. It was afterwards discovered that the seals of the port and those of the *liqueur* were identical in colour—a circumstance which had led to the mistake.

John Kemble's companion, on this occasion, was an actor who had held an important position in the theatres both of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. At the former theatre, indeed, he had more than once been the substitute for Edmund Kean, when that actor was unable or unwilling to appear; and he had, in particular, so satisfactorily acquitted himself in the part of Othello, that those in power (Drury Lane was then, I

think, under control of the Committee) determined to give him prominence, and thus convey a hint to Kean that they were less dependent upon his genius than he supposed.

The belief entertained of the substitute's adequacy was, however, warmly combated by two friends of the authorities, who contended that the actor's success as Othello was purely exceptional, and due to his close study of Kean's effects. They eventually offered, by way of testing the actor's mental capacity, to write a prologue for him to study, which, though a mere tissue of nonsense, should impose upon him by mere grandiosity of style. The challenge was accepted, the prologue written and confided to the actor, who was delighted with it and eager to deliver it. I do not give the name of this performer, because I have formed a much higher estimate of him than that of his two satirists. The anecdote was told me, as absolutely true, by Mr. W. J. Fox, who also furnished me with a copy of the prologue in question. It runs thus :—

“When Grecian splendour, unadorned by art,  
Confirmed the Theban Oracle—in part;  
When Genius walked digestive o’er the scene,  
In meagre mystery of unletter’d mien;  
When man first saw, with an inverted eye,  
The tearful breath of purple panoply,—  
’Twas then the Muse, with adamant grace,  
Replied, prophetic, from her Pythian base,  
And Roscius bent his Macedonian knee  
Before the squadrons of Melpomene.

“But mighty Shakspeare, whose salacious fire  
Waved high his banner o’er the marble choir,  
Spurned the base trammels of despotic Jove,  
And taught the stern Persepolis to love.  
In fancy cradled, like some Northern light,  
That westward gilds an oriental night,

Tearing with ruthless hands the sacred root  
Of "man's first disobedience and the fruit"—  
So waked our bard that histrionic lore  
Which Siddons suckled, but which Garrick bore.

"'Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind'  
Through freedom's mists beholds—what's left behind,  
Whose ebon limbs those gory bonds entwine—  
The heavy, hempen, equinoctial line—  
Mutely exclaims and, supplicating, bends;—  
'The lovely young Lavinia once had friends.'  
So let our author, whose enamelled hopes,  
Exfoliate to-night such classic tropes,  
Through this, his tragedy, those laurels share  
Which Drake and Wickliff both were proud to wear,  
And take his chaplet loud from British hands,  
As Cato died and Trajan's column stands."

"I have been assured," said Mr. Fox, "that the actor in question was delighted with the prologue, and much resented its being withdrawn before the production of a new play."

At the period of my acquaintanceship with Mr. Charles Kemble, the deafness from which he had for some time suffered was become considerable. It had the effect—very frequent in such cases—of deceiving him occasionally into the belief that he was speaking in a confidential whisper, when he was really speaking at the top of his voice. This misconception of its range led at times to results which would have been amusing but for the fear that the knowledge of them might have pained him. One night, when he was reading to us, Mrs. Crowe, authoress of "The Night-side of Nature," and of various poems and dramas, chanced to be one of our guests. She showed great delight in his readings, and made herself in every way amiable to him, exerting herself also to meet his infirmity, by speaking in a loud tone on whatever subjects

interested him. In the course of the evening he withdrew me to a little distance from the circle, and imparted in stentorian tones an impression which he meant to convey in the most private manner. "What an agreeable and highly intelligent woman," he shouted, "Mrs. Crowe is!" It is almost needless to say that the recipient of this unaddressed tribute was delighted with it, and that, in common with the rest of us, she showed her sense of it only by a smile, quickly suppressed, and unobserved by the eulogist.

The following is an instance, on a wider scale, of the amusing perplexities which sometimes arose from Mr. Kemble's deafness, and his inaccurate perception of the tones he made use of. He had been much impressed by the abilities of a young actress, who afterwards rose to the highest rank in her profession. On being introduced to her his interest increased, and the Nestor of dramatic art gave to the neophyte all the advantages which his brilliant talents and long experience could supply. One of the leaders of society was, through the influence of a friend, won over to the cause of the young performer. With a view of promoting her interests, Lady —— gave a *soirée dramatique* to guests who were, in most cases, representatives of what was then most celebrated or select in the life of the metropolis. The entertainment of the evening was the reading of "Hamlet" by the actress in question. Charles Kemble was present, and it chanced that I sat by his side. His *protégée*—she might almost have been called his pupil—had on the previous evening been reading in public at one of the chief provincial towns. She had, consequently, arrived

a good deal fatigued in London only a few hours before the time fixed for Lady ——'s *soirée*. Not unnaturally, at the opening of the reading, her voice was rather feeble, and her manner and expression lacked something of their habitual animation. Charles Kemble was quick to perceive that the lady was wanting in her usual force, and to express his regret and dissatisfaction in accents which were heard by all present, though he fully believed that he was speaking either in unnoticed asides, or imparting his concern to me in the most guarded undertones. "Can you hear her?" was his first high-pitched inquiry; "I can hardly catch a word!" As the reading proceeded, his mortification and the utterance of it became still more emphatic. "Oh, she's so inanimate; she's not doing herself justice! She's injuring herself. I can't tell you how sorry I am; they won't have the faintest idea of her!" It was in vain that I strove to arrest him, first by silence, then by glances and gestures. These latter, intended for warnings, he took simply as signs of acquiescence in his complaints, and as provocations to their repetition. At length, an intimate friend of our entertainer was dispatched to me, with an urgent request that I would apprise Mr. Kemble of the effect he was producing. To do this, without exciting general attention, was, on account of his deafness, a difficult task. To induce him to leave the room, and then to explain matters to him as delicately as the case would permit, seemed the only practicable course. In order to effect this, I made signs of being overcome by heat, even to faintness, which soon attracted his attention. The kind old gentleman soon

proposed that we should leave the room, and offered his arm to support me. Having quitted the drawing-room, I threw myself on a chair in the refreshment-room which adjoined, and counterfeited a gradual recovery from brief indisposition. This point being gained, it seemed well to turn the conversation upon the reading of the night, and to observe, in answer to my companion's renewed lamentations upon that subject, that the reader, besides suffering from fatigue, might perhaps have felt a little discouraged by the expression of his disappointment. "But how could she guess that?" he asked. I pointed out that her ear was accustomed to his voice, and that it was just possible some of his unfavourable comments might have reached her. "What!" he exclaimed in consternation; "you don't mean that what I said could have been heard by any one but you?" I permitted myself to remark that his interest in the matter had led him now and then to raise his voice, and I repeated the conjecture that his brief criticisms might once or twice have reached the subject of them. "Oh, I trust not, I trust not!" he cried earnestly. "I will take care to make no further observation." I now did my best to lessen his apprehensions, and he returned to the drawing-room, I fully hope, with the impression that his kind concern for me had been his only motive for leaving it. The heroine of the night was by this time in full possession of her genius, and, at the close of "Hamlet," deserved and received the warm plaudits and congratulations of the veteran actor, as well as those of the general company.

Charles Kemble had nice and delicate taste in



matters of the palate as well as of the intellect. The little dinners at which I assisted, though composed of few dishes, generally included something *recherché*. I once caused him severe mortification by eating a morsel of preserved ginger at the beginning of dessert. "I told you," he said in a grieved and reproachful tone, "that I was about to give you one of the finest clarets, in my opinion, ever tasted, and now you have utterly disqualified yourself for appreciating it."

On one of these pleasant evenings he overflowed with dramatic suggestions, and gave me the outline of an effective plot, laid in former days, in which a young Swiss should marry a girl of foreign extraction, and then, quitting his own country for hers, enter the army of his new home (probably Austria), in which his services should be engaged against his native Switzerland, and thus—an actual, but at first unintentional, traitor—fall into the hands of his father, who should be commandant of a military post on the part of the Swiss. The complications and struggles which this position involved smacked of the "high Roman fashion" of Cato and Lucius Junius Brutus, and of that toga-heroism which the comedian had probably admired in his stately brother. Charles Kemble himself, I believe, in a play, original or adapted, called "The Point of Honour," had delineated a dramatic conflict on lines similar to, though not identical with, those of the plot just described. He also dwelt with great fervour upon the opportunities which the reign of our second Henry offered to a dramatist, with its combination of striking figures—the sagacious Henry himself; his insubordinate sons,

Henry, Richard, and Geoffrey; John, who disgraced his descent; the scheming and bold Queen Eleanor, and the hapless Rosamond. On no poetic field, however—except, perhaps, that of the forsaken epic—could such thronging personages and such great events have been adequately displayed. The late Mr. David Roberts, R.A., who was one of our small group on the night referred to, zealously recommended the story of Montezuma for tragic treatment. It was pleasant to note the glow in the actor's eyes as Mr. Roberts referred to the stirring incidents connected with Montezuma's life, and to the grand scenic effects which a tale of ancient Mexico would yield. These had, no doubt, appealed strongly to the architectural painter as a noble frame for dramatic action.

One of my latest glimpses of Charles Kemble was due to meeting him one summer day in Great Portland Street, with an open volume, which he had been perusing, in his hand. On my arresting him, he showed me the volume with a gentle smile, and with some remark on its suitability to his years. It was a well-known devotional work—I think, the “*Imitation of Christ*.”

Charles Kemble's retirement happened so soon after I became a playgoer, that, as already stated, I have had to found my impressions of him on two performances on the stage—those of Hamlet and Mercutio—on a few public and private readings, and on conversations. It is not, however, too much to affirm that, in his later day, he stood alone as a legitimate comedian. “Where now,” writes Leigh Hunt, on Kemble's retirement, “shall we seek the high Roman fashion of look and gesture and attitude? Where shall old

chivalry retain her living image, and high thoughts, 'seated in a heart of courtesy,' have adequate expression? Where shall the indignant honesty of a young patriot spirit 'show fiery off'? Whither shall we look for gentlemanly mirth, for gallant ease, for delicate raillery, and gay, glittering enterprise?" In a notice written long before, Hunt praises him as being perhaps, in his "complaining softness," the best of theatrical lovers, were it not for his occasional languor. As to this latter defect, though I saw no trace of it in his Hamlet or Mercutio, it has so often been attributed to him that it probably existed.

That he was relatively unsuccessful in the display of broad and intense passion, is to be accounted for not only by want of physique, but by the minuteness of his style. I have heard him give so many reasons for particular renderings of certain passages in Shakspeare, that his notes on the text, if printed, would probably have surpassed it in bulk. Tragedy, as a rule, requires the strong and swift impulse of leading ideas, and the almost unconscious absorption of all minor suggestions into a massive whole. Yet this minuteness was scarcely out of place in the meditative Hamlet, his presentment of whom, though far from being the most powerful, was the most touching and picturesque that I have seen. He had great sensibility, if not overwhelming passion. In one of her letters Mrs. Siddons\* avowed her preference for his Jaffier to that of John Kemble, speaking of the latter as being too "cold and formal" in this part, and "without sensibilities sufficient acute for a lover," though admitting his

\* John Payne Collier's "An Old Man's Diary."

superiority in characters of a sterner kind. From private as well as public report, it would seem that Charles Kemble's Mark Antony was one of his very finest parts, and that his address to the citizens over Cæsar's body, from its first disclaimer of complaint against Brutus, his following insinuation of Cæsar's virtues, and his apparent reluctance to read the will which made the Romans his heirs, down to the grand final effect—when public indignation had been aroused—of unveiling Cæsar's body, and appealing to the crowd for retribution, was an absolute triumph of skilful, varied, and passionate elocution. As an instance of the actor's sense of consistency, that fine critic, John Oxenford, observed that when the house came to the redeeming points of Charles Surface, it had been fully prepared for them by previous indications of the spendthrift's better nature. This sense of consistency was, doubtless, habitual with Kemble. An actor of rare and varied accomplishment is, perhaps, the phrase which best sums up his claim to admiration—the accomplishment which springs from quick and sympathetic intelligence, and from a natural sense of grace and harmony applied and developed by unremitting labour. This celebrated comedian had reached his seventy-ninth year at the time of his death, which took place in November, 1854.

## CHAPTER V.

## MR. WILLIAM FARREN, THE ELDER.

Difficulty of replacing him in various characters—His son heir to some of his traditions—Lord Ogleby and Sir Peter Teazle belong to a relatively new era in comedy—The man of fashion from the reign of Charles the Second to that of George the Third—Account of Farren's Sir Peter Teazle—A vein of indulgent cynicism characteristic both of his Sir Peter and his Lord Ogleby—Account of the latter—His Malvolio—His Sir Anthony Absolute—Want of robustness and heartiness—A painter of well-bred people, with their vanities, and other foibles, and redeeming qualities—Excellent in the pathos attaching to mental or bodily infirmities—His best known characters but few—His Bertrand in "The Minister and the Mercer"—His Michael Perrin in "Secret Service," in 1834—The latter piece revived at Covent Garden in 1840—His Michael Perrin described—His performance at the Olympic, under Madame Vestris, in 1837 and 1838—His acting in "Sons and Systems," and in "The Court of Old Fritz"—His Old Parr at the Haymarket, in 1843—His chief excellence in characters of mental or bodily infirmity—A touch of the morbid necessary to his pathos—His persuasion that he could act tragedy—His attempt at Shylock—His fine discrimination as to expression in acting—Instance of this—His personal appearance—His death.

AMONGST the great actors of the century who are gone from us, there is, perhaps, none whom it would be so difficult to replace as the late William Farren. We have, indeed, in the son who bears his name, a sterling actor, who inherits some of his traditions and accomplishments; but

the individualities of the two men are distinct, and the plain, frank manners of our own day have, very naturally, had their effect on the style of the present artist. In the mean time, tragic actors, melodramatic actors, eccentric comedians, have disappeared, and found successors apparently to the public content ; but the old beau of George the Third's reign, with the formal characters in some points akin to him of previous times, took, in many respects, a long leave of the stage when the Lord Ogleby, the Sir Peter Teazle, and the Malvolio of the elder Farren last retired at the wing.

The two former characters belonged to a new era in comedy. Each differs widely from the previous type, which had its original in the man of fashion under Charles the Second. If, on the whole, a mere libertine, that personage brought to his love of pleasure a dashing spirit of gallantry and adventure, for which he was, in some measure, indebted to the changes of his fortunes. With one who had known, while yet young, defeat, exile, and sudden restoration to a splendid court, life was at fever heat, and the stage showed it. In a generation or two the romance connected with the Restoration had greatly subsided. Intrigue, become deliberate, had lost its impulsiveness. The beau, young or old, of that period was still a wit, but no longer a knight-errant. After the death of Queen Anne ensued a period of utter grossness in morals. Vice in high places, shorn even of wit, looked ugly enough to produce a reaction towards high-breeding and decorum. At the accession of good King George the Third this reaction had already set in, and, in spite of some excesses in this reign, was strengthened by the influence of the Court.

The fine gentleman of the time was known by the disciplined restraint of his emotions and passions, the plausibility of his language, his formal courtesy, and his minute observance of the punctilios of etiquette. Gallantry, politeness, and good taste revived, though they had lost their old spontaneity. They were, however, *de rigueur*, as much the external attributes of a gentleman as his lace ruffles or his *chapeau-bras*. The code of honour still existed in all its stringency; but, on the whole, owing to the suppression of natural impulse, existence itself was become a sort of carefully acted comedy. Love stopped short at sentiment and taste, displeasure showed itself by chilling politeness, or, now and then, perhaps, with the old, by a pardonable lapse into testiness. Such was the generation of which two elderly specimens (one furnished by the senior Colman and Garrick, the other by Sheridan) will always be associated with the late William Farren, no less than with his distinguished predecessor, Thomas King. Graphic as is the Sir Peter Teazle of the dramatist, but half of his individuality can be gathered from the written page. In Farren, the unmistakable air of refinement, the dry, quiet enunciation, which added more force to epigram than the most studied declamation could have given; in the scenes with Lady Teazle, the sense of provocation, generally tempered by the courtesy of a well-bred man to a woman, even though his wife; the uxorious admiration, oddly mingled with annoyance, which her brilliant sallies called forth,—these were felicities of expression which, though suggested by the dramatist, implied on the actor's part a power of translating mental ideas into the forms of actual life that was



scarcely short of invention. Among other subtleties of Farren's performance was the excitement which now and then contrasted with his habitual efforts at self-restraint—a display produced neither by Lady Teazle's recklessness nor by her seeming heartlessness, but by the raillery which sometimes made him look absurd. Thus, his anger was far less provoked by her suggestion that it would be obliging in him to make her an early widow, than by her quotation from that "forward, impertinent gipsy," Cousin Sophy, who had described him as "a stiff, peevish old bachelor." A man of Sir Peter's type can forgive wrong far more easily than ridicule. Farren's touches of extreme irritability when exposed to the latter, set this trait in admirable relief.

No qualified comedian fails in so capital a situation as that of the "screen scene." For Farren it was, of course, a triumph. One special felicity of his acting deserves, however, to be singled out. I refer to his manner when Joseph Surface, to shield himself from a still graver discovery, pretends to Sir Peter that he has an intrigue with "a little milliner," who is then behind the screen. I have seen Sir Peters—"and heard others praise them"—who greeted this confession with such explosions of boisterous laughter, that it was clear they had seen nothing in it but drollery. Farren, while fully bringing out what was ludicrous in the position, never forgot the trust Sir Peter had so long placed in the man of moral sentiments. The comedian's air of bewilderment and incredulity, his tickled laugh, at first half smothered out of respect to Joseph, and breaking out in aside indulgences, were as true to the character as they were taking

in effect. When Joseph quits the room, and Sir Peter disclosed the secret to Charles, the actor's mirth was naturally undisguised. Yet it was never coarse; it never lost refinement or *finesse*; it was the mirth of a somewhat worn man of society, who finds one of his few piquant diversions in contrasting the set proprieties of outward decorum with the frailties which they affect to disguise. A vein of tolerant cynicism, indeed, is the natural product of an age in which the extreme emphasis thrown upon forms will suggest the discrepancy between them and the qualities they should express. Such cynics, however, have their moods of generosity, since, unless they had an ideal standard of good to which they sometimes conformed, they would less perceive the contrast between forms and realities. Thus, both Sir Peter and Lord Ogleby are at the same time satirical and good-natured. Farren's excellence in the latter character has been attested by Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, no less than by more recent critics. And what a test character it is for a comedian! What a mixture of shrewdness and infatuated self-complacency, of causticity and courtesy, of puerile affectation and manly judgment, of selfishness and chivalry! To say that Farren realized and harmonized all those aspects, is in effect to say that he was one of the greatest of comedians. He possessed to perfection the *nuances* of expression, apprehended with the finest delicacy the effect of semitones. To indicate to the audience his delight at his valet's flattery, while he laughs at it, or rebukes it with an air of sincerity; to tolerate the tediousness and bad taste of the vulgar Sterling with a genuine urbanity, which, nevertheless, a

lad in the gallery knew to be the disguise of a martyr; to touch the acme of senile absurdity in his wooing of Fanny, and yet to afford through it a glimpse of the knightly feeling which, in his bitter disappointment, afterwards makes him her friend and protector,—these were the achievements of Farren in one of the most elaborate characters in modern comedy. His very appearance in the part was a dramatic effect. In the studied and cautious walk, even in the listless fingers, there was a gleam of the decayed beau, as there was in the character itself a gleam of decayed chivalry.

Not only in showing the marks of social position did this actor excel. He could represent admirably the dispositions and manners of those who covet and ape it; he could assume equally the graceful *nonchalance* of my lord, and the importance and minute ceremoniousness of the major-domo. In personations of the latter kind, as in Malvolio, he would exhibit a delightfully humorous imitation of some rare and subtle quality in true breeding. In many Malvolios the leading feature is contemptuous superiority; in Mr. Farren's it was lofty condescension. He despised the coarse world around him, but he was for the most part affably tolerant to it, as a man who knew the graces, and "practised behaviour to his own shadow in the sun," could afford to be. In characters like Sir Anthony Absolute, in the downright, choleric, but good-hearted stage-fathers of the old school, he was excellent in their impatience, fault-finding, and petulance, but wanted heartiness in their better qualities. There was not a touch of "John Bullism" in his nature. To paint

with subtle insight, and with just, delicate, sure touches, the vanity, the self-love, the inconsistency, and now and then the redeeming good-feeling of worldly, well-bred people, and occasionally the credulous faith of simple, guileless people, were his special functions. Yet the cynicism from which this capacity springs has its pathetic side also, and Farren could move one to tears in such characters as the deceived Michael Perrin in "Secret Service," or a Grandfather Whitehead, where life itself is touched with the irony of fate, and second childishness counterfeits the first in the thoughtless glee, the dotting fondness, and the hysterical passion of age.

The most widely-known characters of this comedian are, considering the length of his career, comparatively few. The cause of this was probably their frequent repetition. But the parts in which he deserved to be remembered would make a long catalogue. In 1834 he made a great impression at Drury Lane, in a piece from Scribe, entitled "The Minister and the Mercer," in which he personated Bertrand, a scheming diplomatist. He was still more successful in Michael Perrin, in "Secret Service," a piece also adapted from the French, and produced in the same year. Michael Perrin became one of his stock parts. It was revived at Covent Garden, under the management of Madame Vestris, in 1840. The simple, guileless bearing of Farren, as the *ci-devant* curé (who is betrayed, through his affections, to promote unconsciously a political intrigue), his grief when he learns that his beloved niece has concealed her poverty and sold one of her trinkets for his

support, his artless joy when he finds himself able to earn money, and his indignant protest—all the more powerful because contrasted with the curé's sweetness of nature—when he learns that he has been used as a spy, were admirable features in a performance as consistent as it was impressive. In 1837-8, at the Olympic, where he succeeded Liston, Farren's acting in "The Country Squire" and "Naval Engagements" is spoken of with special praise. To his forcible but delicate power in dramatic portraiture in "Sons and Systems" and "The Court of Old Fritz," both produced at the same time, in 1838, I can personally testify. In the former piece he played the part of a father whose theory of training is that of stern and unrelaxing discipline. To this character is opposed that of his sister, whose rule is one of unbounded indulgence. The sister, a widow, was, by the way, capitally represented by Mrs. Orger. The systems of both brother and sister prove equal failures, the sons making their escape, and marrying in defiance of their parents. Upon these latter the effects of filial rebellion are different. The severe doctrinaire father becomes benevolent and forgiving, the indulgent mother irascible, and for a time relentless. As the sharp disciplinarian, with unlimited faith in his system, Farren's vigour and self-complacency were admirably assumed, yet with such a touch of exaggeration, and such an endeavour to justify his system, that one felt it to be rather the result of a mistaken theory than of a harsh disposition. Accordingly, when, after the frustration of his scheme, he changes under the wiles of his daughter-in-law, disguised as a lad, into a forgiving old man, and inhales with ill-concealed

delight the incense offered by the adroit youngster, the transformation seemed as natural as possible, while the phase of pleased senility was as life-like as had been that of the paternal martinet. One capital effect was Farren's amusement at the change in his sister, while decrying her new severity with a self-satisfaction that drolly condemned his former self. Mrs. Nisbett, it may be observed, acted the part of the disguised bride, who wins over the old man. All was prettily and cleverly done, but the part was scarcely one of importance. In the "Court of Old Fritz," Frederick the Great and Voltaire are the chief personages. Both were represented by Farren, who in these delineations gave one more proof that he was an actor who could play not only a range of parts suited to his own personality, but that he could throw himself with success into widely different individualities. No characters could have been more unlike than that of the brusque soldier-king and that of the easy and imperturbable wit and cynic; but in which of these he was the more life-like, the objective actor left as a moot-point to the public. His Old Parr, too, produced at the Haymarket in 1843, well deserves a word, if only for the felicity with which two phases of old age seem to have been discriminated. Already a centenarian when he first appears, Parr still retains activity and cheerfulness. He is a little garrulous—the only mental sign of his very advanced age. When the curtain again rises, nearly thirty years have been added to his existence. He has yielded to the infirmities which a term of life prolonged beyond all modern precedent has entailed. His frame is bent, his gait tottering, his memory ruined, the

aims of life all but gone, but with them the cares also. His second childhood, with its innocent diversions, its wandering chat with a lad in his service, its momentary anxious inspection of flowers and attempts to name them, its beginning once more to spell out life by the alphabet—no personation could have been more subtle or more directly pathetic by the very absence of pain.

It is curious that Farren's excellence seems to have been confined to parts in which infirmity, mental or bodily, was a special trait. In the elderly and uxorious husband, the dilapidated gallant; in the unruffled nonchalance of a sceptic like Voltaire, or the irritable authoritativeness of Frederick the Great; in parts where old age lapsed into the extreme sensibility or the oblivious placidity of second childhood, as in Grandfather Whitehead or Old Parr, or in the credulous unworldliness of Michael Perrin—he was truly admirable; but it is indicative of his mental bias that he could not play, or, at all events, did not choose to play, the hearty, genial Englishman, full of spirit and feeling, and free from peculiarities. He could be pathetic—most pathetic; but there mingled a touch of the morbid in the pathos that suited him. As already hinted, he seemed to the writer a theatrical cynic, who, in portraying the wanderings of men from a mental ideal and a just equipoise of character, sometimes infused into his characters moving or redeeming touches of the ideal itself which had been violated, or of the healthy judgment which had been impaired.

Farren's belief that he could act legitimate tragedy, his appearance and failure in Shylock,



for instance, is well known. In poetical passion he could scarcely have succeeded, for the sceptical penetration of the satirist is at war with the enthusiasm that tragedy requires. Yet he could be deeply moved by the enthusiasm of other actors. I recall, once at rehearsal, an instance of his fine perception of the shades of expression. An actress, justly celebrated, had thrown great intensity into the utterance of wounded and indignant love. "What would you say," asked Farren, "to taking that speech just a key lower?" He then recited the passage after his own conception, and all present felt that it had gained in dignity and pathos by the repressed emotion of his delivery.

With his tall form, his full lip, and quiet, unspeculative eye, there was little in Mr. Farren's appearance off the stage to denote his genius as a comedian, except in those rare moments when, interested in talk, it was suggested by his then mobile and placid face. His death took place in September, 1861, at the age of seventy-five.

## CHAPTER VI.

## MR. AND MRS. CHARLES KEAN.

The latter part of Charles Kean's career the most notable, though his reappearance in *Hamlet*, at Drury Lane, in 1838, a great success—Account of this performance—Charles Kean less successful in other Shaksperian characters—Imitations of his father adopted in 1838—Afterwards abandoned—Effect of this change—His *Macbeth* in 1849—His *Romeo*—His *Richard the Third*—This character ranked next to his *Hamlet* in Shaksperian plays—Reasons for his superiority in *Hamlet*—Personal acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean—Favourable first impressions of them—Their generous appreciation of dramatic work—They appear, in 1849, at the Haymarket, in the author's tragedy entitled "*Strathmore*"—Mr. Kean's performance in this play—Some difference of view between him and the author—Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean at rehearsal—Her solicitude for him—Their appearance in "*The Wife's Secret*"—Mr. George Lovell—Journey of the writer and a friend with Charles Kean to Brighton—A delicate discussion on the way with respect to Phelps and Sadler's Wells—Peace secured—An amicable dinner—Change in Kean's style of acting soon after entering with Keeley on management of the Princess's Theatre, in 1850—More original hitherto in comedy than tragedy—His *Master Ford*—His *Benedick*—His *Mephistopheles* in "*Faust and Marguerite*"—The change in his acting foreshadowed in his comedy—First exemplified in serious drama in "*The Templar*," by Mr. Selous—His acting in "*Anne Blake*"—He appears in "*Louis the Eleventh*," in the "*Corsican Brothers*," and in "*Pauline*"—He reads to the author various scenes from "*Louis the Eleventh*," some time before its production—Great impression produced—A triumph confidently predicted—Account of his performance—Rises to

genius in this and other character parts—Account of his Louis the Eleventh—This his greatest achievement—Mr. Henry Irving in the same part—Charles Kean's visit to Plessy-les-Tours—His Wolsey—His Richard the Second—Spectacular and archæological revivals—Danger of excess in these directions—Charles Kean in private—His forgivable egoism—His *bonhomie*, humour, love of fun, and winning avowal of his weaknesses—His sly raillery of Mrs. Kean on her susceptibility—Decline of taste for legitimacy—A melancholy pledge—Quarrel with a dramatic author—The alleged price of listening to a story—*Ex parte* statement as to the way commissions were obtained from him—Mrs. Kean's sympathy with him—Hereditary genius—His father's fame, in his opinion, detrimental to him—His strong desire to find his opinions adopted and his side in a quarrel espoused—This illustrated by his difference with Douglas Jerrold—Causes of this—Censure of Mrs. Kean's acting by a critic—Charles Kean's strange method of resenting this, and annoyance with the author for disapproving of his retaliation—His avowed objection to impartial criticism. The model of a theatrical notice—Hears a detailed eulogy of his wife's acting in a particular play—Demands the speaker's opinion at equal length on his own acting—Resents the notion that a man ought not to be praised to his face—His expedient for meeting this objection—A last interview with him—A glimpse of him, during illness, at Scarborough—His death—Brief summary of his claims, professional and private.

MUCH that is most noticeable in the career of Mr. Charles Kean is exclusively connected with its later period. Had he died or retired before his lesseeship of the Princess's Theatre, in 1850, what was most individual in his acting, and what most distinguished him from the number of fairly intelligent and well-trained tragedians who have their day, and then glide out of recollection, would have hardly been surmised. However, his reappearance in "Hamlet," in January, 1838, at Drury Lane, after a long course of preparation in the provinces, was, it must be owned, a great success—the first he obtained in London. I well remember the excite-

ment with which I read the eulogies of the Press generally upon this performance, and the fervour with which my youthful judgment endorsed them, when, one night shortly after his reappearance, I struggled into the pit. Nor was this impression deadened when, after a lapse of years, I saw the same actor in the same part. He had at that time enriched it with many new details. It is true that his Hamlet was not remarkable for subtlety, nor even definiteness of conception. Whether he inclined to Goethe's view of the character, or to any other in particular, could not very easily have been determined. Psychology in poetic characters was not yet, at all events, one of Mr. Kean's strong points. But the grace and earnestness of his style, the care bestowed upon the delivery of favourite passages, and the skill, not always free from artifice, with which certain effects had been prepared, delighted many who, if they could secure a varied and brilliant display of emotion and stage effect, were not nicely critical as to depth of conception and harmonies of characterization. Charles Kean's acting in his first interview with the Ghost was greatly admired. Awe and filial devotion could hardly have been more effectively manifested. In addressing the Ghost his tones were generally hushed and tremulous. It seemed as if he had felt that mortal sounds were too gross in so dread and sacred a presence. Yet there were moments when the majesty of the apparition seemed to raise and inspire him. Nothing could have been finer than his tone of growing confidence and exaltation when he rejoined to the expostulations of his companions—

“Why, what should be the fear?

I do not set my life at a pin's fee;

And for my soul—what should it do to that,

*Being a thing immortal as itself?*”

Performers of Hamlet are always applauded when they break away from Horatio and Marcellus to follow the Ghost. There is, of course, great opportunity for a telling struggle, and for a striking contrast between the tones Hamlet employs to his companions and those addressed to the Ghost. Charles Kean seldom missed a point where stage effect and true feeling are thus capable of being united. I have never seen an actor who more fully conveyed the feeling that his fate “cried out” to him with tragic vehemence to obey his father's summons; I have never seen a Hamlet whose grief for his father was so pervading, so inwardly gnawing. It surpassed that of either Macready or Charles Kemble, imparting a more sombre character than theirs to the Prince's irony, and a darker colour of present suffering to his indignation. It is not at all meant that his indignation was softened by his grief—on the contrary, his self-reproach, and his invective against the King in the soliloquy beginning, “Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” were amongst his most passionate and successful explosions—but that, whereas, with the two other performers named, grief seemed at this point to have been almost absorbed in the desire for revenge, in Charles Kean's case anguish for his father's “taking off” was as vividly portrayed as if the event had been of yesterday. He was very successful in the scene with Ophelia, the poignancy of his invective being accompanied by an expression of such forlorn hopelessness, that his love revealed

itself, not only in spite of, but by means of his bitterness. His burst after the play-scene, as he threw himself on Horatio's neck, "Why, let the stricken deer go weep!" etc., had a rare mingling of wild energy and hysterical grief. In the closet-scene, his denunciation of the King and of his mother's perfidy was less forcible than Macready's, probably because, in his expostulations with the Queen, the sense that he was still her son was, under the circumstances, almost unduly apparent. His most effective, but somewhat tricky point, after killing Polonius, of sliding up to the Queen, while, with eyes riveted on her, and a hissing voice, he exclaimed, "Is it the King?" roused frantic applause. These were the salient points of his representation, of which the general characteristics were fervour, grace of bearing, and a pervading melancholy which approached the sentimental.

Apart from his Hamlet, many effects of which had, from an executive point of view, been most thoroughly studied, I was seldom greatly impressed by this actor's performances in Shaksperian tragedy. On the occasion of his reappearance at Drury Lane, he had introduced various imitations of his father, on dismissing which his acting, spite of occasional bursts of vigour, for which he reserved himself, grew comparatively tame. His Macbeth, when I saw it—in 1849, and subsequently—was painstaking, but, on the whole, feeble and colourless. He had freed himself in a great degree from the point-making which at one time beset him; but, in rejecting theatricality, he had not, except in Hamlet, and perhaps in Richard the Third, attained tragic power. It may be that in "Macbeth" he had hus-

banded his resources for the great demands of the last act, where he showed much physical energy, carrying the audience away, if I may say so, by the "pluck" of his acting. It was exciting; but, for want of skill to distinguish nicely the relation of Macbeth's conflicting qualities with each other, his rage, his defiance, his recklessness, and his disgust with life were so many changing phases to which you had no sufficient key. You had less the thought of a combat with Fate than of a bull-fight, and of the brave and frantic efforts of the tortured animal in the arena. It should be said, however, that he gave with much pathos and taste the soliloquy—

"I have lived long enough: my way of life  
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;"

and that after the Queen's death, with its melancholy iteration—

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day."

His Othello, after he discarded the ultra-vehemence of his early style, was on the same level as his Macbeth, its painstaking inadequacy being somewhat redeemed by the actor's great knowledge of stage business and effect, though it presented no sustained display of energy and *abandon*, as did his final act in the latter tragedy.

I once saw him act Romeo. He had not the romance or the chivalrous tenderness of the lover, but he showed great energy in the scene of passionate grief with the friar, and in the scene where Romeo kills Tybalt. His Shylock was conventional, but fairly effective. In Richard the Third he was more than conventionally good. The sardonic, crafty, unscrupulous, and deter-



mined Richard lay well within the range of his conception, while his rendering of it—animated, and full of variety and contrast—did not greatly betray his old sin of staginess. If his Richard, more than any of his Shaksperian performances, was founded on his father's, it was yet so earnest and living, one could not but feel that its adopted points had been thoroughly assimilated. His Richard the Third stood next to his Hamlet as a success in tragedy. His superiority to the end, in the latter, may be accounted for partly by the romance of the character itself, with its sensitiveness to impression, its contrasts of aspiration and despondency, tenderness and satire; by those quick transitions of the eventful story which perpetually stimulate the actor; and, lastly, by the fact that his first great success in London had been won in the part, and that he associated with its poetry something of the glow and ardour which attached to his comparatively early and gratifying triumph.

I made the acquaintance of himself and his wife in 1849. Mr. Webster had placed in their hands a tragic play which I had written for the Haymarket Theatre. I called upon them soon afterward, and can remember few first interviews which gave me greater pleasure. Their simple cordiality and a certain playfulness of allusion on the husband's part to matters in which we were both interested, while the smiling countenance of his wife spoke her enjoyment of his humour, made me at home with them at once. Nor could anything be more frank and generous than their estimate of the play, in which they were soon to appear. I may here say that, at a later period, when Charles Kean became lessee

of a theatre, he and his wife never failed to express the same open and lively pleasure with dramatic work that engaged their sympathies; they never resorted to the poor stratagem of depreciating what they intended to buy.

In the summer of 1849 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean appeared in my tragedy of "Strathmore," which, it may be well to say, has no likeness of character or plot to a novel which has since been widely known under the same title. Mrs. Charles Kean's performance in this play shall be treated of later. Having studied every detail carefully, in conjunction with his wife, Mr. Kean won the warm approval of the press and the public, no less than that of the author. He threw into the chief situations an intensity of feeling which riveted the house. The writer of the piece differed with him, however, in one point, and that an important one. The phantoms of old memories which beset the excited imagination of Strathmore—after, in pursuance of duty, he has doomed the father of his betrothed to death—were meant in the end to be dispelled by his sense of right and moral necessity. Charles Kean, on the contrary, abandoned himself to unresisted anguish, which culminated at the fall of the curtain. He suggested Orestes pursued by the Furies. "Don't you think that fine?" said Mrs. Kean, apart, to the writer, when her husband went through the scene in question at rehearsal. "Very intense and effective," was the answer; "but——" "Oh, do tell him so!" she interrupted; "it will give him new spirit." "But it's not what I meant," was the reply; upon which the author's view was explained to her, and subsequently to the actor. "I will try to express your view,"

said he ; “ but I am disappointed that you do not like mine. What should I make of the situation if I acted it thus ? ” He then gave the writer’s conception, but with such tameness and want of sympathy that the audience would, without question, have been far less moved by it than by the previous rendering. The author held to his conviction that, if his notion had been sympathetically carried out, still higher effectiveness would have been secured, as well as truth of idea. “ Oh,” cried Mrs. Kean, in an earnest whisper, “ don’t thwart him ! I like his way better than yours ; but, if it were wrong, his heart is in it, and he will make far more of it than of your way, which does not seize him.” So far as the effect of his acting in this particular scene was concerned, there was truth in this reasoning. A sort of compromise between the two views was effected in theory ; but, in practice, Mr. Kean was always mastered by his original bias, which is hardly to be wondered at, as he gained great applause by following it. I give this little relation as an instance of the watchful care to gratify her husband which Mrs. Kean never failed to evince.

Amongst other plays produced by the Keans at the Haymarket was the popular and effectively constructed “ Wife’s Secret,” by the late Mr. George Lovell, who united to his dramatic gift such a faculty for business that the Phoenix Life Assurance Company, of which he was secretary, testified their sense of his great services by presenting him with his portrait. Mr. Lovell was the author of “ The Provost of Bruges,” a tragedy which Macready persuaded Bunn to produce at Drury Lane. Though the piece was abruptly withdrawn, it was greatly and deservedly ap-

plauded, its situations being finely conceived, its dialogue showing throughout vigour and fancy, and rising towards the close to great power. This play was reproduced by Phelps at Sadler's Wells. It is one that, with a reviving taste for the poetic drama, will probably reassert its claims.

"The Wife's Secret," without being a play of so high a class, afforded many and great opportunities to the performers who represented its hero and heroine. Of these Mr. and Mrs. Kean availed themselves with such marked effect, that the piece remained for years amongst the most attractive in their *repertoire*. During what may be called the period of Charles Kean's first manner, there were few dramas in which he displayed more fervour or achieved greater success.

Shortly before he became co-lessee of the Princess's Theatre with the late Mr. Robert Keeley, I and Mr. A., a friend of mine, met him by chance at London Bridge Station. We were all going to Brighton, and it was at once arranged that we should travel in the same carriage. That which we entered was occupied only by ourselves, and our privacy was uninvaded during the journey. This circumstance, which seemed conducive, by freedom from restraint, to social enjoyment, proved in the result a little unfortunate. My friend A. was almost as impulsive and open-hearted as Kean himself, and, in his willingness to communicate, did not sufficiently weigh the possible effect of his communications. When I had introduced him to Kean, who already knew him by repute, the talk naturally turned upon theatrical matters, and, in particular, upon the prospects of the legitimate drama, which Kean's

near enterprise at the Princess's was intended to promote. Then ensued the following dialogue, which, though reported after many years, is substantially accurate throughout:—

"There are, and always have been, difficulties in the way of highest art," observed Kean.

"Yes; the fit audience is too often the few," answered A.; "and the difficulty is still greater where the few are divided."

KEAN: "Excuse me, I don't quite understand. How divided?"

A. "I mean this; whenever the legitimate drama has prospered, there has always been one actor whose supremacy was undoubted, as in your father's case, and, in a less degree, in Macready's."

I began to think we were on delicate ground. Macready's supremacy was hardly a point to be insisted on to a contemporary tragedian. A.'s simple-mindedness and interest in his subject had evidently hid this truth from him.

A. (*continuing*). "However, Macready's engagements in London are likely now to be comparatively short; but you must prepare yourself, Mr. Kean, for a hard battle with the supporters of Phelps."

KEAN (*after a pause*). "But Mr. Phelps is the manager of a suburban theatre; our interests are not likely to clash."

A. "Oh, pardon me, he draws to Sadler's Wells intellectual playgoers from all quarters—the West End, the Clubs, and the Inns of Court—and they swear by him."

MYSELF (*trying to effect a diversion*). "You told me, Kean, that you play to-morrow at Brighton. I suppose Mrs. Kean is there?"

KEAN. "Not yet; she will follow me."

A. (*charged with interest and information*). "And I am sorry to say, Mr. Kean, that the admirers of Phelps, at Sadler's Wells, are not always generous partisans. Sometimes they assail you openly in the theatre, by shouting out comparisons when Phelps makes a point."

KEAN (*a little restlessly*). "Of course I can't expect to be a favourite with Mr. Phelps's audience."

A. "Perhaps not; but, still, partisanship should have limits."

MYSELF (*interrupting*). "Favourite actors, of course, have partisans."

A. (*addressing KEAN*). "Why, in the last pantomime at the Wells (I am sure without Phelps's authority), — made up for a complete caricature of you, and did all in his power to make you ridiculous. Of course, the many roared; but I condemned the whole exhibition. I tell you this only to show that Phelps has a powerful following in the public, as well as in the press, and that you will doubtless have something of a battle to fight with him."

A faint laugh from Kean, a muttered aside, and at last this dangerous subject was dismissed. It spoke well for his amiability that, on our arrival at Brighton, he insisted on our dining with him. He probably discerned the truth that A.'s disclosure had flowed from an open and guileless nature, quite incapable of giving intentional offence. Fortunately, the dinner passed away in cheerful talk and anecdote, with no recurrence to the disquieting topic of the morning.

From the time that Charles Kean entered, in

1850, upon the management of the Princess's Theatre with Mr. Robert Keeley (who soon after retired), the signs of a broad change in his acting, even in serious pieces, became apparent. In comedy, though he played it comparatively seldom, he showed from the first more original insight than in high tragedy. There was much individuality in both his Master Ford and his Benedick. The former, indeed, was an excellent personation. It abounded in those quaint and realistic touches which he afterwards threw into his serious acting, of which it was to some extent an adumbration; for his second manner in serious drama may be described as a quaint blending of the minute and homely traits and humours with a tragic force, which they kept within the limits of a somewhat grim reality. The mingled agitation, perplexity, and humour of the scene where Master Ford, for his own ends, eggs on Falstaff to tempt his wife, and of subsequent scenes; the restless aside glances and gestures by which the actor revealed his jealous pangs; his rage at the intending seducer, and his shame at himself for practising a mean stratagem—were so expressed as to prove at once the reality of his passion, and provoke irrepressible mirth at the oddity of its manifestations.

The same minuteness and force of silent expression proved very telling in his Benedick, which showed a frank, genial enjoyment of jest and repartee that at once commended it to his audience. No part did he invest with so much eccentric humour, or with so many complex effects, as his Mephistopheles in "Faust and Marguerite"—a piece taken from a French version of Goethe's great poem, which ingeniously contrived



to eliminate the poetry. Kean produced "Faust and Marguerite" at the Princess's, in 1854. The tawdry nature of the piece in general was redeemed by his acting of Mephistopheles. The contempt of this personage for human failings and inconsistencies was blended with a sense of so much amusement at them, and the satirical comments were uttered with so much dry indulgence, that the sinister Mephistopheles became far more diverting than many characters in set comedy. Now and then, however, there was a revelation of something terrible in the grotesque individuality—like the gleam which suddenly comes into the eye of a playful cat at the sight of a bird—which made the entire effect unique.

It has already been said that his peculiar qualities in comedy foreshadowed much of the coming change in his serious acting. Perhaps the first example of it was his acting in a piece entitled "The Templar," written by Mr. Selous, and produced early under the Kean and Keeley management of the Princess's. In this piece Kean had to personate a wronged man yearning for revenge, but compelled for awhile to hide his purpose. The "reserved strength"—to use a later phrase—which he displayed, the occasional dry colloquialism, and the tendency to express passion rather by significant low tones than by exertions of the voice, were remarked upon by several as a contrast to his former high, declamatory style in tragedy. The delivery of one line—

"The tiger crouches ere he takes his leap,"

produced a great effect by its quiet, ominous concentration. At the end of the play, a keen, if

somewhat fastidious critic—the late Mr. G. H. Lewes, no warm admirer of the actor—observed to me, “Charles Kean is changing his style into a natural one. He will convert me yet.”

A still more conclusive proof of his new predilection in art was supplied by his acting in the present writer’s play of “Anne Blake,” produced at the Princess’s, in 1852. Though a drama of contemporary life, the incidents and characters were such as demanded the exhibition of strong emotion; and Mr. Kean admirably reconciled this necessity with the tone and habits of modern society. Once or twice, indeed, he seemed to sacrifice the *abandon*, of which he was capable, to a desire to conform to the usages of the drawing-room; though, as the events were more exciting and romantic than those which generally transpire in drawing-rooms, more demonstrative feeling than is generally found there would have been allowable, even granting the doctrine—which may undoubtedly be pushed too far—that the habits of a period have a despotic right to govern its emotions. Still, it must be said that the performance in question was one of great excellence, of admirable keeping, and of a manly, if, at times, repressed force, which made its way to the heart, through all the impediments of everyday customs and attire.

But it was not until the production of Mr. Boucicault’s version of “Louis the Eleventh” at the Princess’s, in 1855, that Charles Kean set the seal upon what I have called his second manner in tragedy. This manner, as has been said, combined the quaintest realism of detail, sometimes embracing the minutest peculiarities of a character, with all the heat of passion.

Other indications of this might have been found in the deadly coolness of his revenge and hatred in "The Corsican Brothers," and in the hero of the drama called "Pauline." In the former it would have been difficult to surpass the quiet and menacing intensity of his acting, or, in the latter, the effect of passion at white heat, strangely enhanced somehow by the realism of modern costume and the non-chalance of modern manners. In the duel-scene of this piece he held the house breathless. By the conditions of the duel, the result must be fatal to one of the combatants. Thus the silent, concentrated quietude with which Charles Kean prepared for the encounter; the way in which he combined the merciless determination of fixed hatred with the refined ease and placidity of the man of society; the air of calm acquiescence in his fate when he removed from his lips the blood-stained handkerchief which betrayed his mortal wound,—all these details, if less ambitious than those of his acting in tragedy proper, far surpassed them generally in dramatic suggestiveness, incisive power, and freedom from artifice.

Some time before the production of "Louis the Eleventh," Charles Kean had recited to me, at his house in Torrington Square, several of its most telling scenes, including that memorable passage in which Louis, while arranging a murder with two of his creatures, on hearing the *Angelus*, devoutly takes off his cap, garnished with leaden images of saints, reverently mutters a prayer, and then returns to the project of the murder in the identical tone of voice he had used when interrupting himself. I well remember my delight at an effort which, in my opinion, promised to eclipse

all his previous successes, and I was so far carried away by my admiration as to say this, when, troubled for a moment, he exclaimed, "Yes; but what of Shakspeare?" Shaksperian characters, it was agreed, did not fall within the range of comparison, after which he showed the heartiest pleasure at my prediction of a signal triumph—a prediction which it is needless to say was thoroughly fulfilled when the tragedy was at length brought out.

Charles Kean's success in Louis the Eleventh served to prove conclusively that, if he was an average actor in heroic parts, he was an original genius in certain character parts—that is, parts which exhibit various human passions, with a modification of their expression peculiar to the person represented. His appearance, as he first came upon the stage—the askant and furtive look, the figure bent slightly forward, the slow and wary step, the hands closely locked—conveyed at once suspicion and keenness to detect, and foreshadowed a singularly individual representation. Selfish cunning, unscrupulous and remorseless meanness—meanness even to abject fear—were the leading features of the personation; yet through these penetrated often the habit of authority, and even, at moments, something that revealed the royal strain of the house of Valois. In the first act, the desperate love of life which prompts Louis to moderate his rage, after the warning of his physician, his brief relapse, and his attempt to bring impetuous passion within such limits of cool malignity as might be safely indulged, were given with such truth to nature, and with so admirable an ease of transition, that deep interest and eager expectation were aroused

before the actor had been many minutes on the stage. The scene where the King insinuates to Tristan the murder of Nemours has already been alluded to. It is enough to add that when, at the ringing of the *Angelus*, Louis interrupted himself, and, hat in hand, muttered his prayers in a hypocritical parenthesis, and, on the bell ceasing, resumed the suggestion of the murder in the very tones and words with which he had broken off, the wonderful picture of wickedness and dissimulation converted expectation into fulfilment, and convinced the playgoer that his gallery of dramatic characters was about to be enriched by an arresting portrait. So truly was every following scene realized, that it would be mere monotony of praise to dwell upon the sick King's delight with Marthe when she rallied him upon looking so young and hale; upon his almost paternal kindness, not over-emphatic or over-sweet, to Marie, when he strove to worm from her the name of her lover to destroy him, while his face, when averted from her, revealed his craft and relentlessness; upon his feigned humility to the Burgundian envoy, till, hearing of his master's defeat and death, he gives, with fierce exultation, the order for his arrest. The scene, however, in which Nemours threatens Louis with instant death, introduced effects so new to the stage in a tragic actor, that it must have special record. First, there was the effort to meet the terrible emergency with submission, conciliation, denial of guilt, and prayers for mercy. Then, as resource after resource failed the threatened man, there rose from him, with frightful iteration, a cry like that of some hunted creature in its extremity—not a natural, pleading cry, however abject, but

the scream that speaks of a horrible, purely animal recoil from death. The effect was appalling. In a poetic or heroic character, however criminal, such horror would have been out of place; but in the base nature of Louis, only idealized later by the actual presence of death, it was in keeping with the Dutch literalness, or rather, the grim Hogarthian significance of the entire study. Repulsive, but never to be forgotten, its sudden and terrible fascination for the audience was something like that felt by a wayfarer of old, when lamp or torch on the road abruptly disclosed to him the erect gibbet and its hideous burden. In the last scene, the character of Louis, with its fearful realism, was almost redeemed by Charles Kean into poetry, so vividly did he present the solemnity of death. As the King tottered on to the stage—a crowned spectre, swathed in royal robes—his look caught something of awful dignity from his consciousness of doom; his face bore the seal of mortality. The vain effort to cheat himself into a belief in returning vigour, the spasmodic attempts at action, the greedy clutch at the crown that is passing from him, his terror at the announcement of death struggling with his desire for vengeance on Nemours, the final terror which makes him forego that vengeance, the sense of vanity in all earthly things, and the piteous cry changing into desperate command for the prayers of those around—all these in their detail had no less of imagination than reality. Few more impressive moments of the stage can be recalled than that in which Louis, believed already dead, rises and thrusts his ghastly face between the Dauphin and Marie, as if to revoke the pardon to Nemours. The



frantic yearning for life and power was, indeed, so depicted, that the King's death was a relief from painful but absorbing tension. Awe and pity pervaded the hushed house. After such agony, even a wretch like Louis could be pitied. The play of "Louis the Eleventh," though strong only in its one central character, gives great scope to a fine actor. Louis at once became the great feature of Charles Kean's *répertoire*. Those who have seen Mr. Irving in the part may congratulate themselves that it has by no means passed away with the actor who introduced it to England, but retains, spite of some points of difference, its old power and individuality in the hands of its later representative. I may here observe that, some time after his appearance in "Louis the Eleventh," Charles Kean paid a visit to Plessy-les-Tours, marked by its associations with that execrable monarch. In one of the tragedian's letters, I had an interesting account of the visit in question.

After the performance of Louis, Charles Kean never went back entirely to his old style, even when representing poetic characters. His Wolsey, in "Henry the Eighth," became as individual a churchman in his way as is a modern ritualist, while his Richard the Second abounded in those realistic peculiarities which distinguish men of kindred nature from each other, rather than in those ideal qualities which express the general likeness of men of the same type. But his portraiture had now acquired more than conventional accuracy; it had something of that poetic truth which is the inmost reality. There is no great need, however, to dwell on his spectacular revivals, such as "Sardanapalus,"



"A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Henry the Eighth," and "Richard the Second," in all of which pageantry was not only introduced but obtruded, while in the last work a display of too minute correctness in armorial bearings, weapons, and household vessels, made the Stage an auxiliary to the Museum, and forced it to combine lessons on archæology with the display of character and passion. Of course, correctness and suggestive beauty of illustration are in themselves commendable; but it can surely never be right that accessories should overpower our interest in the actor, who, if he have genius, will often rivet us heart and eye upon himself, so that we forget the accessories. It would be difficult to name the exact point at which spectacle ceases to minister to dramatic effect and begins to impair it. The decision as to this will not be the same with every playgoer, but it will probably be the same with all intelligent audiences, and thus justify or condemn the particular spectacle exhibited.

No subsequent impersonation of Charles Kean showed power so striking and original as that revealed in his Louis the Eleventh. With the remarks on his great acting in this character, my criticism on the actor, therefore, almost ceases.

As a man, notwithstanding the pardonable egoism which he took no pains to disguise, Charles Kean had many qualities that ensured not only esteem but attachment. He was irreproachable in his domestic life, free and open in his manners, and faithful to his engagements. When free from the nervous anxiety and sensitiveness which at times troubled him, he showed a *bonhomie* which was quite charming—quaint

humour, childlike enjoyment of fun, and a guileless frankness in proclaiming his own weaknesses which utterly disarmed censure. His generally grave expression, and his guttural and rather monotonous voice, were obvious disadvantages; but now and then they lent a peculiarly dry effect to his passages of humour, in the course of, or at the end of which a very winning smile would perhaps light up the gravity of his aspect, and reveal his sly enjoyment beneath it. This kind of serious humour he indulged habitually in private. Mrs. Kean's quickness of emotion when rehearsing her parts gave frequent openings for his grave sallies. He used to rally the writer by complaining that his wife was more affected by the study of his characters than was good for her spirits. "Marston," he exclaimed at a family dinner one day, when Mrs. Kean was carving, "I fancy you are for a second slice of mutton. Please address yourself to me, and I will communicate with my wife. A request for mutton from you would probably throw her into tears, and force her to leave the table." This was said with a stolidity of manner that made it doubly waggish, while the gleam in his eye told how much he relished the pleasantry.

His profits from "The Corsican Brothers" were far greater than those from any other work he had produced. "Ah," said he, with a melancholy which the monetary success of this piece a good deal tempered, "the old legitimate drama is fast dying before these new sensations. Fill your glass, and let two old-fashioned actors drink sympathetically with an old-fashioned dramatist. Perhaps we shall be the last of our race."

On the same occasion—for trifles had some-

times importance to him—he related with some glee how he had out-manœuvred a certain dramatic author, who evidently designed to cut him in the street. “No, no,” said he; “Charles Kean is not a man to be cut; so I bore down upon him, said ‘How do you do?’ and forced a gruff response, without offering my hand.” On my asking what offence he could have given this gentleman, he answered, “The offence of telling him, when he entered my dressing-room some nights ago, that I was glad to see him, but that I could not afford to let him *tell me a story*.” “And you were both on the best terms a short time since!” said Mrs. Kean, regretfully. This phrase, “Tell me a story,” seemed to need further explanation; so a full statement followed as to the disagreement between Kean and his author. According to this possibly biassed version of the actor-manager (Kean was then lessee of the Princess’s), he had been surprised by a demand, on the part of his former friend, for the price of a drama which had recently been rejected. The author maintained that the piece had been written under contract, but this Kean emphatically denied. “Had any terms been discussed?” I asked. “None whatever,” was the reply; “but it was doubtless understood that if I liked the piece I should give the terms I had previously paid him.” “On what, then, does he ground his claim for a contract?” “Ah! there it is,” exclaimed the sympathetic wife. “Like one or two others, he asked Charles to listen to an anecdote.” “Just so,” resumed the manager, with a pathetic sense of his hardships. “He walked into my room, and, after the usual greetings, said, ‘Kean, shall I tell you a story?’

I, of course, knew that 'story' was another term for 'plot of a play.' I answered that my arrangements were made for some time, but, with that explanation, I was always glad to hear any notions of established authors. He told the story. I thought it very taking—you know how well X—— tells a story. 'You like it, then?' said he. 'Do you like it well enough to let me set to work upon it?' I referred to the difficulty mentioned—the pieces I must bring out previously—but said I should certainly like to see his drama when completed. It *was* completed—clearly in a hurry. The strong points of the tale had been so weakened by diffuse talk and by a poor underplot, that I could scarcely have believed a dramatic story could have been so spoiled by a practised writer. I declined the piece as politely as I could, and was then met with the demand to pay for it under my contract. Of course, by saying I should like X—— to set to work, I simply meant that the idea of the piece was worth pursuing. I had no conception that I was committing myself to take it, however it might turn out. X—— has, at all events, taught me this lesson—that it is a very risky thing for a manager to let an author sit opposite to him in his dressing-room and regale him with 'a story.' I laughed, saying I should take his warning, and henceforth send my stories to him on paper for his acceptance. My impression is that a compromise was afterwards arranged between Kean and the dramatist, and a good understanding in some measure restored.

The conversation turned one day upon hereditary genius. "A man may be very proud of his father's fame," he said; "but in some cases

it's about as damaging a legacy as can be left to him. If it had not been for *my* father's fame, I should have made my way with the public twice as easily. When I took his view of a character, it was the fashion with shallow people to call me an imitator. On the other hand, when I took a line specially my own, the cry was, 'What a difference between Charles Kean and his father!'" "Quite true!" exclaimed Mrs. Kean, with her unfailing wifely devotion. At that time, when Charles Kean had not shown the marked originality he afterwards evinced, it did not appear to me that his father's renown had been a serious disadvantage to him. It would have been uncourteous to state this view, so I made some general remark, which I fancied my host received a little dubiously. No man more liked an emphatic assent to his opinions. He would even take it a little amiss if you did not espouse his cause vigorously when he chanced to have a quarrel. On the occasion of his difference with Douglas Jerrold, he signified his intention of sending me his version of the case so soon as it should be printed. Perhaps this announcement drew forth no particularly warm response from a man who, having already heard the opposite version, knew that something was to be said on both sides. Subsequently, Mr. Kean stated his grievance—or what he believed to be such—with so much energy, that his companion was obliged to remind him that he was on friendly terms with Douglas Jerrold, whom he frequently met, and for whom he had much esteem. This remark was followed by a gloomy silence and a speedy close of the interview, in which "Good mornings" were exchanged some-

what briefly. A staunch adherent himself, Charles Kean did not greatly relish impartiality in his friends where his own interests were concerned.

The coolness between him and Jerrold was owing to some difference respecting the comedy by the latter, entitled "St. Cupid." At an earlier period, however, than that just referred to, Kean had been a good deal mortified by some expression of Jerrold's. A piece of his had been chosen for the royal theatricals at Windsor. Of these Kean was the manager. Jerrold, who desired to be present at the acting of his piece, had asked Kean whether this wish could not be gratified. Kean did not see his way to it, as no person could be present at these entertainments without a special invitation or command. "However, Jerrold," said he, "I might possibly take you under my wing, and you might witness the piece from the side of the stage." "*Take me under your wing!*" ejaculated Jerrold, who perhaps suspected an assumption of patronage. "I can dispense with seeing the piece; but I can't reconcile myself to seeing it 'under your wing.'" "And why should he not have gone under my wing?" demanded Kean, in bitter resentment at the implied slight.

Charles Kean fully appreciated the devoted attachment of his wife, and was almost as sensitive as he would have been in his own case to any censure of her acting. On one occasion his displeasure at such censure showed itself in a curious and, probably, unique manner. A certain dramatic critic, who had often written warmly of both Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean, in one particular character so far disapproved of the lady

that he spoke of her acting as "vulgar." Vulgarity was certainly not a fault with which Mrs. Kean could fairly be taxed in general, and the imputation of it to her, perhaps not unnaturally, called forth her husband's indignation. Calling on him one morning, he related to me the offence, and the somewhat droll retaliation to which he had resorted. "I wrote to the critic of the —," he said, "and requested the favour of an early interview. He came the morning after I wrote. I asked him if he had written the notice in question, which he at once admitted. I then charged him with having insulted Mrs. Kean by calling her vulgar. After a little demur he said he had a perfect right to call her acting vulgar if he thought it so. 'No, no!' I cried"—here Kean turned to me with the vehement desire that he sometimes showed to have his opinion endorsed—"no man has a right to call my wife vulgar, either on or off the stage." After a moment he asked my judgment on the matter. To his obvious annoyance, my answer was, that though I by no means agreed with the writer of the notice, yet I thought if he honestly, however mistakenly, believed that an actress was vulgar, he had a right to say so. He had a right to say that a poet or painter was vulgar; why not say so of an actress? "It was false, and it was intended for an insult!" cried Kean; "so I simply said to our critic, 'I shall give you a lesson against insulting my wife in future.' I got up, left the room, locked the door from the outside, apprised the servants, directed them not to go near the apartment. After some hours I returned, and gave order for the prisoner's release." I could not resist a laugh in saying that his conduct



had been quite illegal, and that he had made himself liable to an action for assault and detention. "Oh, it was capital fun!" said Kean, giving way to more impulsive laughter than he often indulged in. "Depend upon it, the position was too absurd for him to make it public." The critic, in his turn, told me the story of his "durance." "Oh yes, I took it quietly," he said, with a philosophic smile. "One does not provoke a madman, but amuses one's self with his antics."

It has already been said, in effect, that, with the love of distinction which belongs to artists of all classes, there was mingled in Charles Kean's case a boy-like openness and *bonhomie* in admitting, or rather, proclaiming his foibles, which, far from offending, attracted the listener; he could not but feel won by a nature which had no reserves and desired none. On his expressing dissatisfaction one night with a criticism which was, on the whole, very favourable, it was suggested to him that a touch of fault-finding, as showing impartiality, gave added value to a laudatory notice. "Oh, I hate impartiality!" exclaimed the frank actor; "I like the admiration that carries a man away, and won't let him stop to think of a few slight and accidental defects." Not long after this, on a chance-meeting in the street, he drew from his pocket a daily paper, which, with a solemn and impressive look, he put into my hand. The paper contained a well-written notice of Charles Kean by a friend who had attained a high position both in law and in literature. The well-written notice proved to be a long and elaborate panegyric which, so far as I can remember, was nowhere spoiled for the actor's palate by the hint of a single blemish or

defect. "Do read it carefully," said Kean, with earnestness. "That's what *I* call criticism!"

Of the unusual candour of his avowals, an amusing instance occurred one night in his dressing-room. When I entered, the curtain had fallen for some little time upon a play in which Mrs. Kean and himself had been acting. Mr. George Lovell, the dramatist, was about to quit the room as I passed in. "Remember, Lovell—remember," cried Kean, laying more than his accustomed stress upon his "R's," "that Mrs. Kean is in the manager's room. Go to her at once!" Mr. Lovell smiled, exchanged greetings with me, and went out. "I have something good to tell you of our friend Lovell," began Kean, in considerable excitement. I composed myself to listen, and he continued—"Lovell was greatly delighted with my wife in our new piece. In that he resembles all who have seen it; no one knows better than I how well she deserves his praise. And it was good, downright praise. He went into the performance, act by act, almost point by point. After a time I said to myself, 'Nothing can be more true. I wonder whether what he has to say of Charles Kean will be as nice?' On he went—capital praise—praise that showed how well he understood her. Still no mention of Charles Kean. 'Oh,' thought I, at length, 'I see; he will first finish with her, then begin with me.' He *did* finish with her. 'Lovell,' I said, 'your opinion of Mrs. Kean delights me.' 'It is quite sincere,' he answered; and then—what do you think he did? He held out his hand and said, 'Good night, Kean!' '*Good night!*' I echoed, astonished; '*good night?*' And you have not uttered a word as to what you think of Charles

Kean in his new part!’ ‘I think very highly of him,’ he replied. ‘Very glad to hear it,’ said I. ‘Then just be good enough to stay a few minutes and go a little into the matter.’ What do you think he said to that? He pleaded the d——d rubbish that he couldn’t praise a man to his face. ‘Lovell,’ I said, ‘have no scruples with me. I act for the very purpose of being praised; I like to be praised. Above all things, I like to be praised to my face.’ However, he begged to be excused, since, though he had great admiration for my acting, he really couldn’t express it at length to *me*. ‘Well, Lovell,’ I answered, ‘Mrs. Kean is now in the manager’s room. Go to her; give her your opinion of Charles Kean, act by act, with the same minuteness with which you have given him your opinion of her. She will convey to me what you are too delicate to express.’ Then you came in. Stuff—stuff! Not praise a man to his face!” I have heard him more than once repeat this anecdote to his acquaintances, with his usual dry enjoyment in relating any humorous passage in which he had taken part.

After he resigned the management of the Princess’s, I had but few opportunities of meeting with him. The last, I think, was at breakfast, at the Great Western Hotel, Paddington, when I had the pleasure, after a slight difference, of renewing cordial relations with him, and of extending his term in a little drama, which, after all, he was unable to produce, and which was eventually produced at the Haymarket, under the title of “The Wife’s Portrait.”

In the autumn of 1866 I chanced to be at Scarborough. The evening before leaving, when passing by one of the hotels—I think the Prince

of Wales's—there appeared, framed in one of the windows, a worn, pallid face, with a look of deep, melancholy abstraction. "Charles Kean!" I exclaimed to myself, and prepared to retrace my way and call. But, having heard already that he had been seriously unwell while playing a round of provincial engagements, I thought it better not to disturb him or to bring home to him a grave impression as to his health, even by a card of inquiry. In little more than a year after this his death took place. It occurred in January, 1868, when he had reached his fifty-seventh year.

Reverting to him as an actor, it may be predicted that his Hamlet, with its varied and finished execution, will dwell in the memory of all survivors who have seen it. Many of these will also recall his claims in some other well-known characters already mentioned, to which may be added that of Sir Edmund Mortimer in "The Iron Chest"—a part, it is said, into which he threw much of his father's harrowing intensity in scenes of remorse. But he will undoubtedly be best remembered by his Louis the Eleventh, which, in its fusion with passion of the extreme realism previously almost confined to comedy, formed a new type of acting on the English stage. His friends who are still amongst us will cherish the recollection of a high-principled gentleman, warm in his attachments, generous in extending to others the appreciation he coveted for himself, and gifted with a charm of simple candour that made even his weaknesses endearing.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MRS. CHARLES KEAN.

Mrs. Charles Kean (then Ellen Tree) in "The Red Mask," at Drury Lane, in 1834—Her acting in "The Jewess," etc., in 1835—The original Clemanthe in Talfourd's "Ion," at Covent Garden—She subsequently appears as Ion at the Haymarket—Notice of her performance—Appears, in 1839, at Covent Garden, under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, as the Countess in Sheridan Knowles's "Love"—The run, then extraordinary, of that piece—Macready's statement as to the then average attraction of legitimate plays, and as to "The Lady of Lyons"—Miss Ellen Tree's acting as the Countess—As Ginevra, in Leigh Hunt's play, "The Legend of Florence," at Covent Garden, 1840—Leigh Hunt's tribute to her—Appears, same year, in Knowles's "John of Procida," at Covent Garden—In 1842 (then Mrs. Charles Kean) appears at the Haymarket in Knowles's "Rose of Arragon"—Her acting in the two plays last named—Indifferent as Juliet and Lady Macbeth—Description of her acting in the latter—Her Gertrude in "Hamlet," Marthe in "Louis the Eleventh," Katherine in "Strathmore," and Anne Blake in the play so called—Brief summary—Personal appearance—Her death.

MUCH that relates to Mrs. Charles Kean, professionally and privately, has already been told in connection with her husband. Some further particulars respecting her may, however, be stated.

I first saw her in 1834, at Drury Lane, in an opera called "The Red Mask; or, The Council of Three," founded upon Cooper's novel of "The Bravo." Several good English singers were

included in the cast, but the character assigned to Miss Ellen Tree (subsequently Mrs. Charles Kean) was one simply for acting. The plot of "The Red Mask" was more dramatic than that of operas in general. Miss Ellen Tree had no great opportunity until late in the piece, but she then availed herself of it with so much pathos and force as to win from her audience the most sympathetic admiration. In Gelsomina—such was the name of her character—she is said to have made a decided advance in public favour. For myself, then a boy in a jacket, the incidents of the opera, and even those of the novel, with which I made acquaintance later, have faded from my mind. I cannot recall the situations which Miss Ellen Tree made so powerful and so touching; but I remember walking home with dim eyes, with her exquisitely feminine and expressive voice still in my ears, and as romantically in love with her as an impressible lad could well be.

A great success is recorded of her in the following year, when she performed, at Drury Lane, the heroine of "The Jewess," a drama adopted by Planché from the original of Scribe. In this drama, it may be mentioned, Mr. Vandenhoff also distinguished himself as the Jew, Eleazar. After "The Red Mask," I saw Ellen Tree as the Witch of the Alps, in Lord Byron's tragedy of "Manfred," which has been noticed in my first chapter.

Miss Ellen Tree was the original Clemanthe in the late Mr. Justice (he was then Serjeant) Talfourd's tragedy of "Ion," when produced at Covent Garden. She performed that character, according to Talfourd himself, with "elegance and

pathos." It did not give scope for any great tragic power. On account of an engagement at the Haymarket, Miss Tree was obliged to resign the part, which Miss Helen Faucit consented at a short notice to study, thus leaving the poet fortunate in each of his interpreters. In the course of her Haymarket engagement, the run of "Ion" having expired at Covent Garden, Miss Ellen Tree reappeared in the tragedy, this time as its hero. After the signal triumph of Macready in the character, her attempt was a bold one. Miss Tree, however, if she had not, in like degree, Macready's power of relieving a part, and his saliency in presenting details, brought very special gifts to her interpretation. Face, form, voice, and simple grace of manner combined to make her externally the ideal of her character, while its purity, nobility, and self-sacrifice, found such sympathetic rendering, that, if I may judge by the experience of my friends and myself, the effect was ennobling no less than touching, while, at the close, the spectator withdrew reverently as after a religious observance.

In 1839 we once more find Ellen Tree appearing at Covent Garden, then under the management of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews (Madame Vestris), in Sheridan Knowles's new play, "Love." To the amazement of London, the play ran fifty nights—then an extraordinary number for a legitimate piece, although it had been much exceeded in melodrama, as in the case of "Black-eyed Susan." For a new work of higher pretension, especially if written in blank verse, twenty nights in the course of the first season was thought quite satisfactory.

I remember Macready observing that, in the



days referred to, twelve or fourteen paying houses to a successful legitimate piece were as many as could be reckoned on. Of course, at rare intervals, there were brilliant exceptions. One of these was "The Lady of Lyons," which, to the best of my remembrance, ran about thirty nights in its first season; but, *en revanche*, I heard from the manager's own lips that he played it for the first fortnight to half a pit, and that it would then have been withdrawn had it not been for the author's generosity, which called for unusual exertions on the part of the lessee. These, with the intrinsic attraction of the piece and the disclosure of Bulwer's name, at length raised the daram into popularity.

To return to Knowles's play and Miss Ellen Tree. The long run of "Love" may be chiefly attributed to her acting. Although "Love" has some strong scenes, the interest is anticipated, and declines greatly after the third act. Mr. Anderson, again, though an actor of gallant bearing and some emotional power, had not then gained such distinction as to make him the hero of a theatre like Covent Garden; while Madame Vestris, though she assumed masculine dress, had no very telling part. The emotional interest of the story centres in the Countess (Miss Tree's character), and in Huon the Serf. The former character, moreover, contains much delicate psychology, and gives fine opportunities for contrast. These contrasts, indeed, would be too extreme, did not the dramatist intend to imply the growing love of the Countess for the serf by the excess of her scorn in resisting it. The conflict indicated was shown, not too sharply, but with a harmony of treatment that reconciled and blended

the most opposite effects, both in the opening scene, where Huon reads to the Countess the story of a peasant who loved a lady of high degree, and in the hawking scene of the second act, where she stands rooted with terror to see the serf leaning against a tree, while the lightning plays around him, and yet struck dumb, lest she should betray her too great stake in his safety. Nothing could be truer to the strife in her nature than her arrested movement and riveted gaze before the serf is struck, her agonized cry and bound towards him when the event occurs, and the overdone indifference and hysterical levity of her feigned gaiety when she hears that he has only been stunned. In the third act her power of facial expression was put to a severe test. Huon has rejected the contract by which the Duke, her father, seeks to bind him in wedlock to another, and death or the galleys is threatened at the end of an hour, should he still refuse compliance. The Countess, immediately after the departure of the Duke, wrests from Huon the truth of the matter, and, while holding in her hand the contract which, for her sake, he has renounced, has to express silently the last combat between her pride and her love, and the triumph of the latter. The strife, with all its alternations, could not have been told so vividly by any language. The audience hung suspended on the mute battlefield of her face, following every turn of the struggle, and breaking into passionate applause at the close, though not a word was spoken till she exclaimed, over-mastered, "Huon, I die!" Her deep sweetness of manner verged upon humility when at last she owned her love; yet

there was a dignity and a power of self-government about her which revealed the influence of race. She was the Countess of the first act, exalted over her pride.

I missed her personation of Ginevra in Leigh Hunt's "Legend of Florence," produced at Covent Garden, in 1840. The sweetness of her long forbearance under the taunts of a jealous and malignant husband, and her pathetic force when she is at last goaded to resistance, were universally admired. Her delivery of the following was specially extolled:—

*"Gin.* I scorned you not, and knew not what scorn was,  
Being scarcely past a child, and knowing nothing  
But trusting thoughts and innocent daily habits.  
Oh, could you trust yourself!—But why repeat  
What still is thus repeated, day by day,  
Still ending with the question, 'Why repeat?'

*[Rising and moving about.*

You make the blood at last mount to my brain,  
And tax me past endurance. What have I done,  
Good God! What have I done, that I am thus  
At the mercy of a mystery of tyranny,  
Which from its victim demands every virtue,  
And brings it none?"

I have heard Leigh Hunt speak enthusiastically of her acting in his play. He betrayed something akin to her own sensibility when he spoke of her bright eyes glistening through tears as she delivered various lines that touched her at rehearsal.

Ellen Tree appeared at Covent Garden the same year, as the heroine of Sheridan Knowles's "John of Procida." At the Haymarket, in 1842, she (then Mrs. Charles Kean) was again enlisted for a play by Knowles, "The Rose of Arragon." "John of Procida" supplied her with no great situation. She had some chances, however, of

showing her devotion to her lover and her father, and these she improved with the sympathetic truth that was her special gift. "John of Procida" can hardly be ranked amongst its author's successes; yet its second act is a remarkable achievement. It consists of a duologue in which no external event takes place, its breathless interest lying in the revelation of himself by a patriot-father to a son who lives in ignorant friendship with the enemies of his country. In "The Rose of Arragon"—at least, in its earlier scenes—Mrs. Charles Kean had somewhat better opportunities as Olivia, the peasant girl who has secretly married the despotic King of Arragon's son, and warns him of danger, though, on the discovery of her marriage, he has caused it to be annulled and banished her from the Court. The ingenuous earnestness of her manner when risking her own life to save that of her stern father-in-law, was one of the chief effects of the piece. Another was her resistance to a sensual villain who has her apparently in his power. The situation is certainly old enough; but the nobility of her bearing, and the splendid energy of her defiance and detestation, revived towards its close a story which was gradually become feeble.

Amongst those results which baffle anticipation, and for which it is hard to assign a cause, was the qualified success of Mrs. Charles Kean in Juliet. With her excellence in characters of sweetness and devotion, and her power of passionate expression, one would have said in advance that this was, above all, a part in which she would have triumphed. It proved otherwise. Of course, experience, taste, and, in a degree,

sympathetic feeling, veiled her want of vital individuality in the character. The spectator, nevertheless, went away disappointed. Perhaps because Juliet is not, after all, eminently a character of self-sacrifice; perhaps because the performer had concentrated her mind upon the acting difficulties of the character, and striven to master them as isolated effects, rather than by entering into Juliet's nature—she did not carry the audience with her, as she had done in many parts offering meaner opportunities.

It might have been predicted that Mrs. Charles Kean would scarcely make a striking Lady Macbeth. With her fine intensity of feeling, fervour of exposition, and power to translate herself into various types of life, she could hardly be said to combine imagination in its strictly poetic sense. She loved to seize those traits which bring a character within the range of actual life—no doubt an excellent method generally, though its sole use hardly suits those types which, while essentially true, are too remote and awful for familiar treatment. The intuitive feeling which divines at a glance from a mere external fragment the spirit of the whole, and which rather descends from the spirit to the form, than attains to the spirit through the form—the method of Siddons and Rachel—was probably beyond this fine artist,—at least, in conceptions of mystery or guilt, to which she could not bring the immense aid of her personal sympathy. Hence there was a sort of artificial moderation in her rendering of Lady Macbeth's terrible adjurations. It seemed as though she had doubted that an actual woman could have uttered them, and had therefore striven to give them reality by softening their

extravagance. From the hints of one or two mighty phrases, on the other hand, an imagination like that of Mrs. Siddons would, one may conceive, seize the *soul* of the woman, take *that* as the reality, and care little whether the probabilities of actual expression were overpassed or otherwise.

Again, in the great scenes of the first and second acts, an attempt was made to present Lady Macbeth under the two aspects of determined will and wifely fascination; but these phases of the character were alternated rather than fused. Mrs. Kean did not seem to perceive that, to a mind like Macbeth's, vacillating between two principles, resolute will was itself part of the fascination, and that, until his crime was committed, she was glorious to him through the very scorn with which, for his sake, she had denounced his weakness.

She was good, however, in her watchfulness over Macbeth in the banquet-scene, and if her feverishly hurried manner of dismissing the guests and repairing to her husband took something from the evil woman's self-control, it was eloquent of conjugal solicitude. In the melancholy and remorse which set in after the murder, she was also more at home than in certain of the previous scenes. Her grief, however, was too simply tender; her sleep-walking scene had not the abrupt flashes of recollection that reveal the hauntings of conscience; her remorse was like the repentance of a nature which had originally been good.

In her later years she often played Gertrude in "Hamlet." It was one of her most perfect representations. Her air of apprehensive melan-

choly, born of secret guilt; her looks of wistful yearning, at times suddenly repressed, towards her son; the obvious compulsion she put upon herself, in the closet-scene, so much being at stake, to "lay home" to him his offences; the divining, shown by a quick, averted look, of his terrible impeachment ere it had well begun; the mechanical way in which her one or two phrases of resistance were urged, and her complete breaking down before the consciousness of her guilt and the eye of her son—scarcely left a detail wanting in the impressive conception. Fine as is the character of Gertrude, it is, of course, so dominated by that of Hamlet, that Mrs. Kean probably performed it so often simply for her husband's sake. Another and much stronger instance of the immolation of her professional interests to his own, was her performance of Marthe in "Louis the Eleventh." Yet her life-like rusticity, the blended bashfulness, apprehension, and shrewd resource with which she clothed her French peasant, raised the little sketch into such prominence that it became the second feature of the play. In two plays of the writer's—"Strathmore" and "Anne Blake"—she displayed pathos so subduing, and traits of character so just and arresting, that he cannot dwell upon them without seeming partly to appropriate the praise that was her due. In fairness to her, however, it should be recorded that her enunciation of the words, "No; die!" when, in "Strathmore," she confirmed her lover in his resolve to accept death rather than falsehood, not only overpowered the house, but won from the press some of the rarest tributes ever paid to an actress.



In sympathetic emotion, as distinguished from stern and turbulent passions, no feminine artist of her time surpassed her; in suggestiveness of detail, no artist but one. Her range was unusually large. Mirth and humour came as naturally to her as self-devotion and tenderness. Her sense of enjoyment was contagious, and free from the slightest touch of coarseness. Her performance of Marthe, just referred to, showed what she could do in characters of eccentric humour. I have heard her at rehearsal, in offering suggestions—which she did with especial tact—assume the language and the looks of the various characters so admirably, that she seemed equally at home in each. The beauty of her fair oval face, with the expressive eyes, and the nose slightly aquiline, accompanied with the charm of her refined and emotional voice, were most captivating in her youth, and much of their attraction lasted to the end of her career. Amongst the women of the English stage who have recently passed from us, there is no figure to which I turn with more general admiration or with profounder esteem. She died in the summer of 1880, at the age of seventy-five.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MR. BENJAMIN WEBSTER.

First acquaintance with Mr. Webster—"Borough Politics"—His quarrel with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews—His habit of confiding differences to others—Called a "good hater"—Certainly a staunch friend—Of a sensitive disposition—His feeling of comradeship—His resentments not lasting—His reported challenge to Macready—His fidelity, as manager, to the interests of his company—Interview with him—His personal appearance and manner—An agreement concluded—His badinage—His frankness and promptness in negotiations—His acting in a little comedy by the writer—Width of his range—His desire to extend it—I read to him some scenes of a poetic drama of which I desired him to play the hero—His pleasure at the proposal and his misgiving—Reasons for it—Variety of his acting in dramas of real life—Account of his acting in "The Roused Lion"—Allusion to the excellence of Mrs. Keeley in the same drama—His acting as Squire Verdon in "Mind Your Own Business"—His nice balance of various features of character—This exemplified—His Richard Pride—His Graves in "Money," Triplet in "Masks and Faces," Reuben Gwynne in "The Round of Wrong"—His Tartuffe—Objections to that comedy—His Jesuit Priest in "Two Loves and a Life"—His Robert Landry in "The Dead Heart"—Mr. David Fisher in that drama—Mr. Webster as Penn Holder in "One Touch of Nature"—His faults—His Petrucchio—His Wildrake in "The Love Chase"—Dragging delivery in his later years—His services as a manager—"The Heart and The World"—Supper after a failure—Dinner to Webster at Freemasons' Tavern—The Shakspeare Committee—Webster's Institutions for actors—His reception in Paris by Napoleon III.—Mr. Robert Bell—Welcome to Keeley—Webster's death—His reputation as an actor and in private.

My personal knowledge of the late Mr. Webster dates from an early period of 1845, at which time he was lessee of the Haymarket Theatre. I had sent him a comic drama, "Borough Politics," which will be more fully alluded to when I have to speak of Mrs. Glover.

In two or three weeks' time I received from Mr. Webster an obliging letter, in which he ascribed his delay to the embarrassment into which Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews had thrown him by abruptly leaving the theatre. He dwelt emphatically upon what he considered the unjustifiable nature of their conduct, in a tone that seemed to demand sympathy for himself. This tendency to repose confidence in one almost a stranger was, I found afterwards, characteristic of him, at least, in the vigour of his days. If he liked you—and he took strong likings—you and your friends were his friends, and he doubtless expected reciprocity. I have heard him called a good hater and a staunch friend. It was my good fortune to know him only in the latter character. He had now and then a way of beginning a sentence in a tone of great cordiality, and of ending it in a tone of reserve, which seemed, I thought, to belong to a nature at once warm and proud, which was jealous of having its regard surprised. It is probable that, with his sense of good comradeship and his eager disposition to prove himself a true ally, he was exacting as to reciprocity, and retentive of what he conceived to be a slight or a wrong. But his resentments were less enduring than they were said to be. A bitter coldness took place between him and the Keans when they arranged to become co-lessees of the Princess's with Mr.

and Mrs. Keeley. To quit his theatre for the purpose of conducting a rival house, very likely appeared to Webster, with his strong cleaving to old fellowship, something like a breach of the decalogue. But if his convictions as to mutual duties were somewhat strained, it is just to say that he obeyed them implicitly, and that, for the sake of past associations, performers were wont to be retained in his theatre long after their salaries exceeded their attractions. With his sensitive character, there is reason to put faith in the report that he once sent a challenge to Macready, who replied that he would be willing to accept it when his correspondent had taken rank as a tragedian by a successful performance of Hamlet. However, it was under Webster's management that Macready's farewell performance took place, the relations between lessee and manager being then most cordial. The former, however, after the sums which he had paid to the tragedian, somewhat resented his speaking at a public dinner of Sadler's Wells, instead of the Haymarket, as the future home of legitimacy. With respect to other little feuds, I believe both those with Mr. and Mrs. Mathews, the Keans, and the Keeleys—if, indeed, the last were ever regarded as *participes criminis*—were eventually composed. Indeed, at the dinner given to Webster about 1865, Keeley was one of the most interesting figures.

As to myself, an interview followed quickly upon Mr. Webster's letter. I had not before seen him off the stage. He was rather tall, with eyes of a bluish grey, a fresh complexion, a figure slightly tending to corpulence, and an engaging frankness of manner. He at once

accepted my terms, and the little piece was produced with a result which, I trust, was not ungratifying to him. A few days later, on being with him in his room, he said, in his rather high-pitched voice, with a sly laugh, "Well, we talked about terms; but I suppose you poets write for fame, and would despise anything so vulgar as a cheque." "And you actors and managers," was my reply, "you, too, doubtless work for fame; but would you be content without salaries or profits?" Seriously, no manager could have been more pleasant to deal with. In my own four or five contracts with him, I never knew him attempt to beat down the price of a piece by depreciation—by remarking, for instance, that it was risky, or that times were hard. If he really wished to produce your work, his brief formula was, "Just draw up a memorandum while I write the cheque."

In the little comedy above mentioned, he played the character of a good-hearted, well-to-do farmer, who is with difficulty roused into a conflict with two of his neighbours by their affronts to his wife. In embodying this part, he displayed his remarkable power of individualization, his genuine feeling, and his happy and varied truthfulness of illustration.

Few actors, indeed, have had a wider range. The heroes of poetic tragedy, or those of high comedy, he scarcely attempted, his *Tartuffe* being an exception. Probably, however, he was not without ambition to make the trial. On one occasion I read to him a scene or two from an uncompleted serious play in blank verse, of which his estimate was only too generous. "But who," asked he, "is to play the chief character?"

"Mr. Benjamin Webster," was the answer, "if he will." He was more touched than the occasion accounted for. "What!" said he, with a warm grasp of the hand; "do you really think I would sustain the chief part, almost tragic, in a poetic drama?" Having expressed my wish that he should make the experiment, he replied,—“I should like it—I should like it, but——” Perhaps there was reason in that “but.” His true feeling and his happiness in presenting individual traits in prose drama might not have stood him in such good stead in imaginative work, where the characteristic is rather of that large kind which paints human nature in general, than of that minute kind which paints the peculiarities as well as the passions of individual men. It happened, however, that the drama referred to remained unfinished; thus the test which the actor proposed to himself never was applied. But, even in the sphere of what is called “real life,” what variety, and what distinctness of conception, were at Webster’s command! To show this it is only necessary to glance at him in a few of his leading embodiments. In 1847 he appeared in “The Roused Lion,” taken from a clever French original, “Le Reveil du Lion.” Stanislas de Fonblanche, the part which he represented, was that of a man rather advanced in life, and, at the beginning of the piece, somewhat of an invalid. A letter has been received by his godson, in which one of his young and thoughtless acquaintances speaks in contemptuous terms of the elderly gentleman, of the consulate, and the empire, and suggests that, with his obsolete fashions and grave years, he would be a mere

kill-joy at a party of pleasure in the days of the Citizen - King. Stanislas Fonblanche, though elderly, is by no means superannuated, and is roused by this reflection upon the manners and accomplishments of a former generation. Accordingly, he contrives to attend a dinner at which his detractor and his godson are to be present. The nature of the entertainment is a little *fête*, and thus admits of sundry exhibitions of talents, such as singing, dancing, and fencing, in the presence of ladies, which are seldom displayed at a dinner-table. The object of Stanislas Fonblanche is to punish Hector de Mauléon, by engaging with him in a strife of wits, and proving his own superiority. This he does most effectually. If Hector ventures upon a sarcasm disguised as a compliment, or upon an affected and overdone politeness, his elderly rival meets him with a repartee as polite as it is crushing, and an easy, high-bred courtesy of the old school, beside which Hector's modern airs look very much like ill-breeding. In singing, dancing, at cards, with the foils, and in other ways, he thoroughly conquers and humiliates him, and becomes, especially to the fairer portion of the company, the central and captivating figure. From the easy languor of the invalid at the beginning, to the high-toned and temperate triumph at the end, Webster was admirable, not only in each phase of the character, in each detail of action, but in the ease and nature which gave unity and consistency to all his transitions. I remember the critic of an influential paper, who was otherwise loud in the comedian's praise, charging him with a certain want of refinement. What seemed surprising to me, on the other hand,



was the presence of this quality in an actor who had shone hitherto chiefly in rough and strong parts. We are all, perhaps, too much disposed to see in an actor the absence or the lack of qualities which we are accustomed to expect from him. It would be ungrateful to omit from this notice of the "Roused Lion" an allusion to Mrs. Keeley's wonderful rendering of Mademoiselle Suzanne Grasset de Villedieu, formerly a *danseuse*, who is anxious to hide her old vocation from Stanislas, while, in moments of emotion, every look and tone, every gesture of head, feet, and arms, unconsciously betray it.

In May, 1852, Mr. Webster appeared at the Haymarket in a play by Mr. Mark Lemon, entitled, "Mind your Own Business." Though not nominally the hero of the piece, he was such effectually. As a country squire, one Verdon, who has set his affections where they cannot be returned, and who passes from a state of over-sanguine anticipation to one of utter recklessness and self-abandonment, he was equally striking, natural, and truthful in each of these contrasting moods. There was now and then a dash of constraint and misgiving in the midst of his hopefulness, which showed the sensitiveness of his disposition and the depth of suffering which the rejection of his love would entail; while in flying to town, in the attempt to drown his misery by gambling and drink, the gleams of a better nature at times broke forth with a pathos all the more affecting because, instead of being sharply contrasted with the darker shades of his character, it was so blended with them as to indicate the same individuality. The yearning of a besotted mind towards a higher life seemed

as natural as the right physical movement of the drunkard when, however unsteadily, he staggers towards home. Notwithstanding all the difficulties of the task, he eminently succeeded in making the position of the drunkard thoroughly pathetic, and in so expressing "the soul of goodness in things evil" that they became touching instead of repulsive. But for the strange improbability in the story, which, after all that Verdon had suffered for love of the one sister, would persuade us that his affections had been all the time unconsciously given to the other, the piece, owing to Webster's acting, would have been a lasting success.

In his rendering of Verdon, as in other parts, the two signal merits of the comedian's acting were comprehensiveness of conception and nice gradation in the expression of feeling. He knew that, with rare exceptions, one leading trait seldom gains such ascendancy in a man as not to be modified by others. I have seen him, for instance, take part in a quarrel-scene, in which a number of qualities had to be expressed and harmonised. At the beginning, when sarcasm and taunts were levelled at him, he responded by a smile of quiet humour, a shrug of the shoulders, and a deprecatory movement of the hands; as the provocation continued, his annoyance was evident, but no less evident the strong common sense by which he chose to master it. His look next became fixed and stern, like that of one who feels a fight inevitable; and when at length his wife was attacked by cruel sneers, and he suddenly blazed up in indignation, you felt how much his anger had gained in effect from his previous self-control—that the very restraints

that had at first checked the flame were now its fuel.

It was, perhaps, his success in "Mind Your Own Business" that led him, in 1855, at the Adelphi, to undertake the tragical representation of another drunkard, Richard Pride, in Mr. Boucicault's drama of "Janet Pride." So powerful in this part was his rendering of the vitiating effects of excess, and of the remorse which struggles with them, that Richard Pride took rank with his most striking impersonations.

As another instance of Webster's versatility, ought to be cited his performance of Graves, in Lord Lytton's comedy of "Money." The conviction that he was born to an unhappy lot, and that the finger of adverse fate went out against him in the smallest trifle, was for a time deep and pervading; and when at last the seductions of Lady Franklin took effect upon him, his change to a sanguine mood was gradual and distrustful; so that in the dance with Lady Franklin, to which he at last abandons himself, there was the quaintest expression in his face of dawning mirth, mingled with habitual melancholy in his movements—fantastic and astonished pleasure so characterized by solemnity, that the novel humour of the representation was irresistible. I have seen in other comedians, notably in the very effective Thomas Thorne, broader contrasts in the part of Graves, which perhaps elicited louder laughter; but the Graves of Webster still remains uppermost in my mind, as a being who, though somewhat exaggerated by the author, one might have met in the flesh.

In 1852, in the new piece of "Masks and Faces," he played one of his finest characters—

that of Triplet, the needy dramatist and portrait painter, whom, with his family, Peg Woffington saves from starvation. The study of Triplet in the actor's hands might be taken as a type of the penurious author of the time. The distraction amidst the sordid cares of life; the nervous impatience, soon atoned for by contrition; the moods of gloomy reverie, at times half pierced by the hope of a nature originally sanguine, but which time and suffering had tamed and daunted; the desperation with which, when unable to please himself with Peg's likeness, he plunged his knife through the canvas, together with an artlessness of look and voice which spoke an unworldly mind,—all these degrees of the better mental worker were so truly indicated, that a glance, a change of tone, however delicate, a stoop, a step backward or forward, or a fluttering movement of the hand, were more significant even than the excellent dialogue in which he took part. And withal this Triplet was a gentleman; no poverty of garb or surroundings could hide that; while the perfect unconsciousness with which this inner refinement showed itself, was a touch of art so true and unpretending, that it was seen only in its effects.

The Peg Woffington of Mrs. Stirling, it may be added, was one of the best, probably *the* best, of her original characters.

Towards the end of 1846 Webster was the hero of "The Round of Wrong," a drama by Bayle Bernard, which, though well-written and containing some good situations, was elaborate to heaviness, and thus narrowly missed popularity. The acting of the principal character was, however, so fine as to deserve record. In Reuben

Gwynne, engaged to marry a girl who afterwards sadly rejects him at the instigation of her father, no changes of character could be more complete, and at the same time more consistent, than those which the actor depicted. The honest cheerfulness, the good-natured liberality of the happy lover who would spread the joy he feels, were shown to the life, as were also the bitterness, the avarice, and the vindictiveness of the man whose hopes and whose faith had been trodden down. Yet, in both aspects, Reuben Gwynne was seen to be the same man. His misanthropy was the reaction against his loving credulity. His longing for vengeance was the wild outcome of his suffering—the mad desire to give torture vent which makes the wounded creature turn upon the hunter. When at length the tables were turned, and his enemy, the father of his old love, lay at his mercy, nothing could be truer than the manner—most gradual in its rise, but sudden in its end—in which the cherished purpose of revenge gradually yielded before the prayers and influence of his restored darling. The spring of his life had returned; the ice which had concealed it for a while broke, and there was the living current.

Another celebrated character of this actor was that of *Tartuffe*, in a version by Mr. Oxenford, originally produced at the Haymarket. He had here to pass from the embodiment of strong or fierce passions, emotions of hearty good-nature and honest anger, of grief and remorse, or of tender emotions, threaded by quaint and simple humours, to that of dissimulation, which is, at all events, meant to be as profound as it is unscrupulous. It may be

heresy in the writer to take a strong exception to what some regard as Molière's *chef-d'œuvre*, but he has striven in vain to think that the hypocrisy of Tartuffe is, on the whole, subtle and plausible. It has always seemed to him, on the contrary, to be so overdone as to advertise unmistakably its own imposture. It was one of Mr. Webster's great merits in the part, that he moderated its excesses as far as he could, and brought it as near to a human possibility as his actions would enable him. The assumption was entirely successful, and Tartuffe became one of Webster's stock parts; thus furnishing one more proof of his power to translate himself with equal effect into the most opposite characters. That of a Jesuit priest, which he played at the Adelphi, in Mr. Charles Reade's "Two Loves and a Life," was a striking, though far less elaborate picture of a higher kind of cleric, in whom the restraint of a strong will upon strong passions was admirably exemplified.

As an expression of power, however, nothing short of tragic must be cited his rendering of Robert Landry, in the first act of the Adelphi drama, "The Dead Heart." Landry, a young sculptor, by the 'machinations of a certain Count de St. Valerie and a godless priest, is immured on false pretexts in the Bastille. The object of St. Valerie in the vile proceeding is to bring within his snare a lovely and innocent girl betrothed to Landry. Nearly twenty years after this shameful deed comes the taking of the Bastille by the infuriated masses, the murder of the defenders, and the release of the prisoners. Of these last Landry is one. But the long-immured man, crushed by despair, solitude, and

the rigour of his treatment, seems to have lost alike consciousness and sensation. The ghastly face, the long and matted hair, the rigid limbs, seem at first to speak of mere inert matter. It is, however, matter faintly stirred with breath that is brought back to day. All means of restoration are employed, but vainly, till the urgent repetition of a name—that of his betrothed—draws forth a tremulous response, after which the gradual resuscitation of bodily and mental life sets in. But the conduct of the process was a masterpiece of art. At first Landry lay like a fossil. It was as if different forces of nature passed one into another—mineral existence thawing into the mobility of animal life, animal life groping its way into human consciousness, and irritating it from its apathy, till at last one saw the recovered man in the forlorn dignity of his memory and his wrongs. No scene capable of such great treatment by the actor occurs in the remainder of the drama. This one scene, however, can hardly be forgotten by those who saw it. Mr. Webster, however, was fine throughout the piece. Let me record here how admirable I thought Mr. David Fisher's representation in this play of the unscrupulous and disdainful *abbé*, whose hateful and malignant nature is rendered just bearable by his scorn of danger. Having seen Mr. Fisher in several parts which he filled like a true artist, I have often wondered that he was not more frequently before the town in important characters.

It was not my good fortune to see Mr. Webster in a small piece, in which he was, by general consent, allowed to be at his best. As the poor dramatic copyist, Penn Holder, in "One Touch



of Nature," he had a part which gave scope to all his yearning tenderness as a father, and to restraints scarcely less touching, by which he, for a time, was forced to check it. He had to make himself known to a daughter who had no recollection of him, at so early an age had she been carried off by the guilty mother who deserted her husband. The daughter, under the name of Constance Belmour, was then an actress. A private rehearsal takes place in the house of a dramatic author, who is dissatisfied with Constance, in the stage-fiction, for her coldness when she has to recognize a father who holds a position precisely analogous to that of Holder to Constance. Fearful that his daughter should lose the chance of acting the part, Holder proposes in this rehearsal to take the character of the supposed father, and, in doing so, relates a number of real details which gradually bring back to the girl's dormant memory her first home and the indistinct vision of a loving father. In brief, Constance throws herself into the old man's arms, and learns from her new experience of filial love how to sustain her part of daughter in the drama. It should be added, that while Holder has been striving to reawaken her memory as a stage-father, he has been trembling lest he should reveal his true character too soon, and that, in portraying these alternations of fond impulsiveness and needful self-suppression, Webster gained a triumph that he had scarcely surpassed. From the slight sketch given of Penn Holder's character, I can well believe his excellence in it.

This sterling actor had few faults; perhaps among the chief of them was a certain heaviness and sombreness in playing the young heroes of

comedy. Thus his Petrucchio seemed really violent and angry, and showed little enjoyment of the part in which he was masquerading. His Wildrake, too, in "The Love-Chase," was oversullen and moody. These parts wanted the geniality and the touches of humour with which he so often relieved his older characters, and even his young ones, when they were *au fond* rather grave than gay. In his later years, too, whether from carelessness or too much occupation, he was seldom perfect in the text when he appeared in a new part. A "fishing for words" and dragging delivery took away from his effects, till he warmed into his part, recovered his memory, or supplied the loss of it impromptu. He took leave of the stage in 1874. From the farewell benefit accorded to him at Drury Lane the same year, few indeed of his more distinguished brothers and sisters in art were absent. He had truly deserved well of his profession. His services as a manager rivalled those he had rendered as an actor. He had assembled a company of actors so numerous, as well as brilliant, that the accidental absence of one star could at once be substituted by another. He had sought to bring to light new dramatic ability by offers which, if they now seem moderate, were then liberality itself, and in the course of his sixteen years' management, it is said, had paid thirty thousand pounds to his authors. It was rumoured that in later years, at the Adelphi, his outlay was less generous. If true that he had learnt, from hard experience, to be thrifty, it is scarcely to be wondered at.

Amongst other plays of the writer, he produced, at the Haymarket, in 1847, a comedy

entitled "The Heart and the World." It was a piece of so purely a psychological nature as to neglect incident, which, instead of being presented with fulness and strength, was only so far outlined as to give a key to mental conditions. This unsuccessful piece is mentioned only to show how lightly at that time the manager bore pecuniary failure. He had built great hopes on the piece, the reception of which on the first night was cold, though not hostile. That its "run" was doubtful was an impression which its author had at once formed, and which he took no especial pains to hide from the cordial manager, who accompanied him home to a little social gathering, and did his best to cheer him on the way. "We shall make a stand," he said. "In a night or two all will have warmed to their work, and the piece will go twice as briskly." When, however, the notices of the new play had appeared, and even the kindest of them did not predict its attraction, it was felt that the general opinion could not be resisted. Without a murmur at his own loss or disappointment, Mr. Webster did all he could to put the baffled dramatist in heart, spoke of his unshaken faith in him, of successes that were soon to sponge out the present failure, and showed himself indeed the staunch friend that he has already been described.

Not very long before the memorable Shakspeare Tercentenary, 1863, a dinner was given to Webster at the Freemasons' Tavern. The unfortunate Shakspeare Committee was at that time seeking to raise funds for a memorial of the poet. It was curious to hear the guest of the evening demand, almost in terms of menace, that,

in honour of Shakspeare, a large part of the sums raised should be awarded to the two establishments of which he was founder—the Dramatic and Equestrian Institution, and the Home for Decayed Actors at Woking. There was good reason that these undertakings should be supported by contemporary generosity, but very little that they should divert from its course the money raised for a personal tribute, the best form of which would obviously have been a statue. Webster's interest, however, in institutions which he had founded, magnified to him their claims, and led him to urge them even with excessive warmth. Very agreeable, however, are the recollections of that night at the Freemasons'. Webster was full of reminiscences of old times and of brother-actors. He spoke, too, with much satisfaction of the cordial reception given him in Paris by Napoleon the Third, whom he had formerly known in London. Robert Bell, our genial and eloquent chairman, proposed the guest's health in a speech full of criticism and felicitous expression. The formalities of the evening then gave way to pleasant gossip, jest, and repartee. At a rather late hour came in Mr. Robert Keeley, who had some time before retired from the stage, and whose entrance was the signal for a burst of welcome, and for one more toast, tumultuously received. Webster was now at the height of his reputation. A few years later his appearance became gradually rarer and rarer. He survived his farewell of the stage more than eight years. He died in the summer of 1882, at the age of eighty-four, leaving as a realistic actor a reputation hardly surpassed for force,

pathos, and humour, conveyed by incisive and subtle detail; leaving, as a man, the memory of an influential and honourable career of liberality in his engagements, and of loyalty in his friendships.

## CHAPTER IX.

## MRS. GLOVER.

Mrs. Glover in early days had often appeared in tragedy—Had performed Hamlet—First saw her as Gertrude, to Charles Kemble's Hamlet—Her eminence as an actress of comedy—Her truth to nature—Her keen perception of characteristics, moderation, and air of unconsciousness—These merits exemplified in her Mrs. Malaprop—Her performance of the character compared with Mrs. Stirling's—Mrs. Glover's Mrs. Candour—Her Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet"—Her Widow Green in "The Love Chase"—The original Lady Franklin in "Money"—Her Miss Tucker in "Time Works Wonders"—She appears in a comedy called "The Maiden Aunt," by R. B. Knowles—Acts in the writer's comedy, "Borough Politics"—Account of her performance—Meeting with her at rehearsal—An argument with the author—Minuteness and fulness of her observation—Her sympathy with authors—Thackeray's tribute to her acting—Reported connection of her family with the famous Betterton—Her death.

IN early life Mrs. Glover had often performed tragic parts, Hamlet amongst the rest. The character in which I first saw her was Gertrude in "Hamlet." I was too much absorbed in Charles Kemble's acting to give her the attention that was her due, but I well recall her aspect of settled melancholy and the sad, deep tones of her voice. Tragedy, however, was become with her, in general, a thing of the past. She had then given up youthful characters, but, as an actress of

comedy in her own line, as the Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet," as Mrs. Heidelberg, Mrs. Malaprop, Mrs. Candour, and as Widow Green in "The Love Chase," she was without an equal.

In reviewing a number of performers whose merits are often alike in everything but degree, it becomes difficult to apply epithets which have not lost something of their force by repetition. To say simply that Mrs. Glover's main excellence was her truth to nature, though no doubt literally correct, would hardly tell anything. Edmund Kean, for instance, Macready, the Kembles, were, of course, generally true to the passions and characters they represented. But this truthfulness can only be general in tragedy which represents the essential feelings men have in common, and rejects everything that savours of mere peculiarity. In comedy, however, which represents the idiosyncrasies of persons, and the modes in which men differ, the expression of vivid personality is often one of the highest merits. This Mrs. Glover eminently possessed. She had an instinct for seizing traits and humours, a moderation in displaying them as just as her perception of them was lively, a wide range of appreciation, and an apparent unconsciousness which gave wonderful reality to her delineations. Thus, in the eccentricities of her parts of speech as Mrs. Malaprop, and in her displays of vanity and credulity, there was a solemn self-complacency, an absence of misgiving, an obtuseness to ridicule, a *vis inertię* of comedy, so to speak, which, in its power to produce the ludicrous, could not have been surpassed by the most active exertions. Those who, having seen Mrs. Glover in Mrs. Malaprop, have also seen



Mrs. Stirling's admirably telling delineation, full of intrigue, life, and movement, of the same part, have had an opportunity of seeing the utmost that two differing methods can produce, and of comparing their effects. In the hands of each, the general outlines of a character so broadly defined as Mrs. Malaprop were, of course, identical. The difference—and it was considerable—lay in shades of expression. In uttering the grandiloquent phraseology of the part, Mrs. Glover's self-satisfaction was more restrained, but not less profound, than Mrs. Stirling's. The former seemed to hug the secret of her superiority, the latter to revel in its presumed effect upon her listeners. The compliments of Captain Absolute were received by Mrs. Glover with evident pleasure, indeed, but with a consciousness that they were absolutely her due; by Mrs. Stirling with a flutter of delighted vanity. In hearing herself described as "an old weather-beaten she-dragon," resentment predominates with Mrs. Stirling, whilst with Mrs. Glover an appealing astonishment against the profanity of the impeachment was the leading sentiment. There are now few who have had a chance of contrasting the claims of these two admirable actresses in the part in question; but even those who have the liveliest recollection of Mrs. Glover will recognize in Mrs. Stirling's Mrs. Malaprop the finest example of old comedy acting left to the contemporary stage.

In Mrs. Candour, again, Mrs. Glover, when uttering her charitable calumnies, wore an air of almost deep and stolid conviction, which showed that the hypocrite, imposing even upon herself, believed that she was defending her

victims while she enjoyed the pleasure of traducing them.

Her Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet" had all the reality of Dutch art applied to character. Her attachment to her youthful charge was strong even to audacity. Her remonstrance with old Capulet, when he threatens and abuses Juliet for refusing the proposed marriage with Paris, had a sullen, half-checked fierceness in it, like the growl of an angry but wary dog when one attacks his mistress. Her attachment to Juliet was, indeed, a sort of animal instinct. It exerted no general influence; it helped to humour, but not to understand or fathom, the young girl's love. She wore a look of puzzled indulgence when listening to Juliet's grief for Romeo's banishment. For a while this, with the Nurse, was a whim to be humoured, by no means to be persisted in at the risk of loss or danger. In all this, of course, the actress only followed Shakspeare; but her manner of doing so was perfect. If self-interest had been an article of the Decalogue, she could not have obeyed it with more implicit faith, with more utter unconsciousness of its meanness. There was a sort of frank rationality in her mien and manner when she urged Juliet to desert her lover, as of one who spoke from her deepest convictions. Her very conscience seemed to be dishonest.

Of her performance of such characters as we have already named, including Mrs. Heidelberg in the "Clandestine Marriage," criticism has taken more ample note than of her acting in more modern plays—of her "Widow Green," for instance, in Sheridan Knowles's "Love Chase." This, however, was one of her best characters.

What a complacent confidence was there in her mature charms, when she questions her maid as to the signs of young Master Walter's disappointment at her absence; what enjoyment of her supposed lover's mortification, what eagerness in her desire to repair it; what indignant disdain for Lydia's pure and disinterested conception of love; what elation at the power of her own attractions, where Master Walter's letter, with the offer of marriage to her maid, falls by mistake into her hands; what truth to nature when it strikes the buxom widow that she looks too saucily happy for the timid bride she fain would personate—

“Amelia, give this feather more a slope  
That it sit droopingly.

\*       \*       \*       \*

Hang this cheek  
Of mine! it is too saucy. What a pity  
To have a colour of one's own!”

And then, how fine and natural were the gradations from rage at her self-deception touching Master Walter to the politic conclusion that, being dressed for the altar, she would do well to escape ridicule by marrying the elderly Sir William Fondlove. Selfish, vain, cunning, worldly, but, on the whole, good-humoured, and with a pleasure in herself that made her pleasant to others, the actress presented a character, the traits of which might easily have been spoiled by exaggeration, with a force which was increased by her moderation—a moderation, be it understood, in which there was nothing tame—and with a harmonious variety which, after a night's acquaintance, made one feel as if one had known Widow Green all one's life.

In 1840, during Mr. Webster's management

of the Haymarket, Mrs. Glover was the original Lady Franklin in Lord Lytton's comedy of "Money." Here, for once, it was possible to take exception to her. She wanted the due enjoyment of her intrigue and the vivacity needed to captivate a nature like that of Graves. She was also, in 1840, the Miss Tucker of Douglas Jerrold's comedy of "Time Works Wonders." As the punctilious schoolmistress, she gave lively and amusing expression to the peculiarities of the part; but the comedy was so crowded with figures that she had relatively little opportunity to do so. At the Haymarket also, while with Mr. Webster, she played the part of the Maiden Aunt in the comedy of that name by Mr. R. B. Knowles, son of the celebrated dramatist. Her delightful geniality and spirit in this character was the mainstay of the piece, which, though slight in plot, had for a *coup d'essai* considerable merit. I am not aware, however, that Mr. R. B. Knowles made any second dramatic attempt.

In 1846 I had the pleasure of securing Mrs. Glover's services for a two-act comedy of my own, entitled "Borough Politics." I had thus an opportunity of observing, at rehearsal, how thoroughly she had entered into her part, omitting no opportunity of watching her relations to the other characters in the piece, or their modifying influence upon herself, the good-hearted but uneducated woman married to a worthy farmer, with a daughter betrothed to the son of supercilious neighbours. The chief trial of Mrs. Thompson (Mrs. Glover's part), at the opening of the piece, is the contempt with which Dr. and Mrs. Neville regard her efforts

to rise in the social scale. The ostentatious re-furnishing of Mrs. Thompson's house has given Mrs. Neville an opportunity for exhausting her powers of sarcasm on the former, who, incensed by a long series of affronts, invokes her husband's protection. Upon this Nathan Thompson, the husband, resolves to dispute in his own person Dr. Neville's election to the mayoralty—a resolution which has the unhappy effect of separating the two lovers of the piece, each of whom now belongs to a rival house. It will be assumed that this sterling actress brought out with admirable effect the delight of the worthy matron in self-display, in the overdone splendour of her residence, her sullen attempts to conceal her mortification under the civil contempt of Mrs. Neville, and the overflow of genuine passion with which she at last retorted upon her, exulting in the success of every well-delivered blow. Nor was her maternal grief less effective, when, her anger fading, she felt that she had brought about a separation between her daughter and her daughter's suitor, and converted her apparently easy-going husband into a man stern and vindictive and a great stickler for ceremonies. All this may be affirmed, and yet it will not show the special point in which Mrs. Glover differed from many capable actresses—that absorption in her part which no mere cleverness of delivery, however appropriate, can substitute or imitate. Take one illustration. When her husband, as probable mayor, is spoken of as “his worship,” the title sinks deeply into the mind of his wife. Though she had nothing immediately to say, her expression showed that she was rolling it over like a sweet morsel.

Knowing that in some cases the rank of the husband gives a new appellation to the wife—that the spouse of a lord or baronet, for instance, becomes “lady”—poor Mrs. Thompson is anxious to know how she will be styled as the wife of “his worship.” Over this question Mrs. Glover fondly brooded, till she sadly discovered that the honorary phrase of “worship” given to a mayor still left his wife a simple “Mrs.” The conversation then turned on other points. She now and then gave a languid attention to it, and then relapsed into her reverie, illustrated by her dejected looks and restless movements. When she at length rose, with the exclamation, “It’s hard, though, there aren’t no female ‘worship!’” she produced a burst of laughter, by disclosing to the audience in words the trouble which, with so much quiet nature, she had expressed in pantomime.

At rehearsal, during the feigned anger of the farmer-squire at his daughter’s melancholy, Mrs. Glover made an expressive gesture indicating that all was right between the two. I thought this rather premature, and observed that the father had said nothing to justify it. She pointed out to me, however, that, according to the stage direction, the mention of his daughter had already cost him a display of emotion. “Oh,” said she, “don’t you think that if such a father is once moved by the thought of his child, she’s sure to carry the day? It was because I saw him struggling with his feelings that I put on that look of pleasure. I felt convinced, at least for the moment, that he would forgive her.” The author deferred to an argument which showed that the actress had more closely studied one

of his characters than he had done. He would apologize for dwelling on this little drama, were it not that his presence at rehearsal gave him an opportunity of noticing the minuteness and fulness of Mrs. Glover's observation more closely than he could have done from her acting. The effects of these qualities might have been equally felt "at night," but the intellectual subtlety of motive that led to them would have been partly missed. On the day after the production of the little piece, it happened that one journal spoke less favourably of it than the general press. I remarked to Mrs. Glover that the criticism in question nevertheless paid the warmest possible tribute to herself. "Oh, that may be," said the actress, with all the warmth and sincerity which look and tone can convey; "but I never feel happy unless the author has his full share of praise with us." After the piece had been performed a few nights, I had the pleasure of meeting Thackeray, who expressed the warmest admiration of Mrs. Glover's acting in it.

It has been asserted that Mrs. Glover, whose maiden name was Betterton, inherited the blood of the famous actor who flourished in the reign of Charles the Second, and his successors. If the assertion be true, the right to such honourable descent was well maintained by this excellent actress. She died in 1850, at the age of sixty-eight.



## CHAPTER X.

## MRS. WARNER.

Mrs. Warner's rank as an actress—Performs both the gentler and sterner characters in tragedy—At Covent Garden and Drury Lane with Macready—Had appeared, in 1836, as the heroine of Knowles's "Daughter"—Her Joan of Arc, Lady Macbeth, and Hermione—Her power in invective and in irony—Her fine impersonations of Emilia in "Othello," and of Evadne in "The Maid's Tragedy"—Account of her acting in these characters—Evadne her chief triumph—Enthusiastic praise of it by Dickens—After separating from Phelps, Mrs. Warner attempts, in 1847, to make the Marylebone Theatre a Western Sadler's Wells—Eventual failure of the scheme—During her management of the Marylebone, Mrs. Warner appears as Hermione, Julia, Lady Teazle, Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Oakley, and Lady Townley—Her want of flexibility in comedy—Great merit, nevertheless, of her Mrs. Oakley—The event of her first season at the Marylebone the magnificent and correct reproduction of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Scornful Lady"—Remarks on this Comedy—The character of the heroine remarkably suited to her—Mrs. Warner in private—First meeting with her at rehearsal at Drury Lane, in 1842—Her acute and humorous remarks on Macready's realistic getting up of "The Patrician's Daughter"—Anecdote told by her of impracticable stage-effects—Her easy and genial manners in private, for the exhibition of which her stage characters gave few opportunities—Her last illness and death.

MRS. WARNER was a remarkable actress, even at the time when Miss Helen Faucit and Mrs.

Charles Kean were at the height of their popularity. In serious characters she was second only to them in public estimation, playing, moreover, a range of sterner characters than they generally appeared in. At the time of her engagements with Macready, both at Covent Garden and at Drury Lane, Miss Huddart, who, in the course of them, became Mrs. Warner, was the recognized Lady Macbeth, Emilia, Gertrude, and Volumnia of those theatres. In 1836 she had made a considerable impression in a part of a strong, but more amiable description—the heroine of Knowles's "Daughter," a play which, though gloomy, might for pure dramatic force compete with any of his productions. I did not see Mrs. Warner (then Miss Huddart) in the character mentioned; but it is due to her to record the warm approval which she received from press and public in a more winning part than those she usually represented.

It may be mentioned here that, in 1837, at Covent Garden, she personated the heroine of a melodrama called "Joan of Arc," the critics generally deposing to her energy and intensity, though one or two accused her, not quite unjustly, of occasional ranting.

Lady Macbeth, though probably the character which Mrs. Warner most frequently impersonated, was not, in my opinion, her most successful one. It had a tolerably well counterfeited air of the true personage, but it would not stand the tests of long acquaintanceship or examination. In the early acts, it was stern, set, decisive, and when need was, impetuous and scornful; but there was all the difference between it and a genuine conception that exists between a

character arrived at and expressed by the understanding, and a character seized by the will and inspired with its energy. There was not that variety of tone or manner which belongs to a woman desperately bent upon an end, and eager to try every resource in turn to secure it. There was a declamatory attempt in the first scene to realize the supernatural, but no real awe, no real trust in "fate" and "metaphysical aid." In the later scenes, Mrs. Warner was dignified and remorseful, and the solemnities of the sleep-walking scene were punctiliously observed, and rendered with all the time-honoured traditions. What, then, did she lack? Depth, incisiveness, the interchange of the shifting moods of emotion, the different shades even of the same emotion which mark life. Yet there was, so to speak, such a consistent *physique* of Lady Macbeth in Mrs. Warner's delineation, and such a propriety in her somewhat surface-exhibition of the character, that she was held for years to be its most satisfactory representative.

Among the few gentler types of womanhood that she occasionally embodied, was Hermione in the "Winter's Tale." She gave with great dignity and queenly patience that wonderful defence of the slandered queen, in which the story of her wrong gains emphasis and force from its moderation. Nothing could be more royal than her appearance in the statue-scene, more finely graduated than the return to life and motion, or more nobly affecting than her final embrace of the repentant Leontes.

She had great power in direct invective, as well as in irony. In the latter she sometimes employed a sinister gentleness, which implied

far more scorn than open bitterness could compass. Her Emilia in "Othello" was finely conceived and executed. She showed a bold freedom of manner, which went far to justify Iago's suspicions of her. With this was combined that sort of half *blasé* ease which comes from knowledge of life, however gained, and of the chief figures of the time, while the whole was lit up and half redeemed by the sudden flashes of that more generous spirit by which Shakspeare has hinted what the wife of Iago might have been under better conditions. Her usual characteristic was breadth rather than subtlety, except in pride, of which she had all the *nuances*. It might be going too far to ascribe her devotion to Desdemona to some remorseful tenderness for one who was the image of her past and purer life. Nevertheless, her acting perfectly tallied with such a conception. She was a different, and, on the whole, a higher being with Desdemona than with others. After the murder of Desdemona, her defiance to Othello when she rates him, "I care not for thy sword," had the passionate recklessness of life which indignation creates, and her entire acting in the passages where she discloses the villainy of her husband was fraught with a fierce anguish of bereavement for her mistress, as well as scorn for her husband and his dupe. For better, for worse, she was that marvellous embodiment of a nature grown unscrupulous through its fall, and yet morally clear-sighted, and capable of generosity and attachment, that Shakspeare has painted with a success equal to his daring.

There can be no doubt, however, that Mrs. Warner won her chief triumph as Evadne in

"The Bridal"—Sheridan Knowles's adaptation of "The Maid's Tragedy," first played at the Haymarket, in 1837. Scorn never took a more regal mien, guilt never borrowed a more redeeming touch of majesty from resolution, self-possession, and contempt of look and tone—all the more withering because they were kept within the bounds of calm restraint, as if Evadne would not allow herself to be much moved by so slight a cause as this new convenience, this despised husband. Her first careless disregard of his expostulation, followed by the cold gaze of her lustrous eyes on him, when he forced her to be explicit, made an admirable contrast. There is a passage in which she asks him what look of hers suits him best. Amintor replies—

"Why do you ask?

*Evad.* That I may show you one less pleasing to you.

*Amin.* How's that?

*Evad.* That I may show you one less pleasing to you."

In the repetition of this answer, her tones were so clear and slow that each syllable took its fullest meaning, and carried home to Amintor the conviction of her recoil from him. When, subsequently, she warns him that it is no maiden coyness that bids her shrink from his arms; that "hot and rising blood" makes her apt indeed for love, but that her beauty pledged to the king shall not stoop to any second wooer, there was an exaltation in the avowal of her guilty passion for her paramour which made her seem an embodiment of sensual beauty, inspired by passion and ignorant of conscience. If I mistake not, it was in this scene that she wore a large necklace of pearls, which threw the haughty, and, if I may use such an epithet,

the sultry splendour of her face into grand relief.

This scene with Amintor was, indeed, a brilliant passage. Nowise inferior to it was her interview with Melantius, when, having discovered her dishonour, he extorts from her a confession as to her betrayer. Her levity and prompt resource of equivocation while she yet doubts her brother's meaning, her haughty and imperious defiance when she at length apprehends it, disclosing a strain of resolution akin to his own, her submission only at the last extremity, when he has wrought upon her shame as well as her terror, were painted to the height, while the praise of a fine artist was due for her skill in softening Evadne's abrupt change from defiance to repentance.

Not long after the revival of "The Bridal," I met Charles Dickens at dinner at the Clarendon Hotel.\* In the course of the evening we spoke together of the acting of Macready and Mrs. Warner in this play. "What a defiant, splendid Sin that woman is!" exclaimed Dickens, with enthusiasm. "How superbly, too, she looks the part!" In short, the great novelist did not speak with more delight of his friend Macready in Melantius (one of his signal triumphs), than of Mrs. Warner in Evadne.

After separating from Mr. Phelps, Mrs. Warner opened, in 1847, the Marylebone Theatre, probably

\* This dinner was given in honour of the benevolent Dr. Southwood Smith, the late Lord Lansdowne occupying the chair. In a book of theatrical recollections, it may not be out of place to record that the genial Lord Carlisle, better remembered, perhaps, as Lord Morpeth, was one of the company, whom he highly amused by humorously avowing his remarkable likeness to Liston, the comedian.

hoping to gain a western suburb the same reputation for legitimacy which had followed the experiment at Sadler's Wells. In this expectation, however, after a brave struggle, she was disappointed. The company by which she was supported, though respectable, was not equal to that collected by Phelps at the Islington Theatre. At the Marylebone, being her own mistress, Mrs. Warner naturally gave her ambition rather a wide scope. She opened with her admirable Hermione in the "Winter's Tale," then played Julia in "The Hunchback," Lady Teazle in "The School for Scandal," Mrs. Beverley in "The Gamester," Mrs. Oakley in "The Jealous Wife," Lady Towuley in "The Provoked Husband," securing for all the characters least suited for her that measure of acceptance which a practised and intelligent performer can always command.

She was generally somewhat deficient in the flexibility necessary for the heroines of comedy, and, indeed, for those heroines whose graver qualities are relieved by vivacity and humour. In Mrs. Oakley, however, she displayed remarkable spirit, and that character was probably the best of her assumptions in purely prose comedy. But the great event of her first season at the Marylebone was undoubtedly the revival of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Scornful Lady," through an adaptation furnished by Mr. J. D. Serle, an actor and dramatist who at that time had some reputation in both capacities. The comedy was put upon the stage with a sumptuous taste and correctness which Macready himself as a manager could not have exceeded. An imposing hall and grand staircase, a noble gallery, running the length of the stage, with



the various apartments from it, and an apartment in the "Lady's house," with its lofty marble mantelpiece, its various decorations and elegant trifles all in keeping with the time, were amongst the chief triumphs of the scenery, while every costume had been made a careful study. Nothing could have been more stately than this frame for Beaumont and Fletcher's picture. It is doubtful whether the comedy itself quite deserved all the praises for wit and spirit which were ascribed to it. In other works of these authors, both these qualities, it seems to the writer, have been more fully exhibited—a circumstance which is perhaps accounted for by the small share which Fletcher is supposed to have taken in the play. Nevertheless, there is enough of invention, of decisive handling of character and breadth of contrast in the characters to leave it effective, even when purged from some of its grossness. The delineation of the Scornful Lady was one of Mrs. Warner's greatest successes. Her haughty severity, kept within the limits of refined courtesy, well became her, and had a sort of provoking attractiveness both for the public and the ill-used lover.

Though it was Mrs. Warner's lot to appear generally in characters of severity, pride, decision, or, in rarer cases, of stately sorrow, she was, in private, full of *bonhomie*, animation, and quick perception. I first met her at rehearsal, in 1842, on the stage of Drury Lane Theatre. The play in preparation, though in blank verse, was one of contemporary life. Macready was anxious—perhaps more anxious than the author—to invest the action with every detail of the most modern realism. For this purpose, the season represented

being summer, during one of the acts he wished the actresses engaged to use parasols. "Blank verse and parasols," said Mrs. Warner, apart, to me one morning. "Is not that quite a new combination?" "Yes," was the answer; "the wish is to show that the present time has its poetical aspect." "And you demonstrate that," she asked archly, "by carrying parasols, and insisting upon other little realisms of the time?" To this, rejoinder was made that the attempt was to show the poetry of the age, in spite of its realistic details, and, therefore, they had to be encountered; and that, inasmuch as it was quite possible for a woman to feel a poetical sentiment—love or admiration, for instance—while using a parasol, it was quite right to allow her to express the sentiment with such an appendage; that the seeming incongruity she referred to sprang from mere novelty of association, and that it would disappear as the association became familiar. "But how far will you insist on this view?" she asked. "If you concede to realism the uttering of poetical sentiment under parasols, realism will soon demand more, and exact from you that the parasols shall cast their shadows on the ground, and just in accordance with the position of the sun." This, doubtless, seemed to her (for the stage resources of limelight were then little known) a difficulty that could scarcely be overcome. However, the quickness of her observation and her power of deduction were amply shown by her objections, no less than was her vein of pleasant humour in the mode of expressing them.

Shortly after undertaking the management of the Marylebone Theatre, she called on us one

morning, and amused us all greatly by anecdotes of the impracticable stage-effects which had been sent to her for representation. One of the dramas she mentioned was founded on a Grecian subject, and required that the defeated hero of the piece, after having been pierced by a javelin, taking advantage probably of the courtesy of his enemies, should ascend the slope of a mountain, and compose himself to die in such an attitude that the rays of the declining sun would just rest upon his brow.\* I give this little anecdote to the best of my memory in Mrs. Warner's own words, though I cannot reproduce the pleasant and easy humour of her expression—all the more noticeable, because she had so few opportunities of exhibiting this quality on the stage. After much suffering, during which the gracious sympathy of Her Majesty was habitually shown to her, Mrs. Warner died at the age of fifty, in 1854.

\* This difficulty, which seemed at the time insurmountable, might now easily be conquered by the employment of lime-light.

## CHAPTER XI.

## MR. SAMUEL PHELPS.

First appearance of Mr. Phelps in London—His reception—He joins Macready's company at Covent Garden—He appears as Leonatus Posthumus, as Adrastus in "Ion," as Cassius, and as Macduff—His acting in these characters—His striking success as Macduff—His acting in that part described—He appears as Cassius for a benefit at the Victoria Theatre—His acting as Cassius—Excitable and impetuous characters suitable to him—The writer meets him in private—Warde the actor—Theatrical jealousies—Phelps's moods of reverie and abstraction—His absence of mind—An instance of it—Phelps in *Iago* and *Othello*—Hazlitt—Fortitude necessary to the tragic actor—Phelps somewhat deficient in this quality—How far an actor ought to identify himself with his characters—Phelps's evidence on this question—The "Syncretics"—Phelps, Mrs. Warner, and others engaged by them to play in Mr. George Stephens's tragedy of "Martinuzzi"—The Syncretic dramatists, Mr. George Stephens in particular—Production of "Martinuzzi"—Acting of Mr. Phelps and Mrs. Warner—Phelps at Drury Lane with Macready—His Hubert in "King John"—His fine performance of Lord Tresham in Browning's "Blot on the Scutcheon"—His management of Sadler's Wells—His *Macbeth*—His *Lear*—His *Hamlet*—His *Timon*, *Coriolanus*, *Mark Antony*, *Brutus*, and *Henry the Fourth*—His *Richelieu*, *Werner*, *Bertuccio* in "The Fool's Revenge," and *Mordaunt* in "The Patrician's Daughter"—His occasional triumphs in tragedies where terror and passion predominate—His chief serious successes in characters of pathos and tenderness or morbid bitterness—His crowning excellence, however, in comedy, often eccentric comedy—His *Sir Pertinax Mac-Sycophant*, *Malvolio*, *Sir Peter Teazle*, *Falstaff*, *Bottom*, *Justice Shallow*—Remark on *Falstaff*—Phelps as manager of Sadler's Wells, and his services to the drama—General

apathy as to things dramatic when he entered upon this management—Members of his company—Sadler's Wells at length attracts lovers of the drama from all parts of town—Enthusiasm there evinced for legitimacy, and for Phelps as its representative—Instances of this—Mr. Phelps in private—Author reads a play to him—His willingness to produce it—An actor's love of pre-eminence—Macready—Phelps and writer differ as to terms—The play eventually produced at the Olympic—Miss Helen Faucit—A second negotiation with Phelps for a play, with the same result—He produces nearly all Shakspeare's plays—Takes leave of Sadler's Wells after more than eighteen years of management—Remarkable revival there of "Antony and Cleopatra"—Miss Glyn—Her introduction to Phelps some time before—List of original plays produced by him—His various revivals—His career after leaving Sadler's Wells—He plants the Shakspeare oak on Primrose Hill—No due public recognition of his claims—Summary of his merits as an actor—His personal appearance, voice, mode of delivery, etc.—His private amiability—His illness and death.

MR. PHELPS first appeared at the Haymarket Theatre, in the character of Shylock, on August 28, 1837. His reception by the press and the public was favourable, though not enthusiastic. After playing various characters at the Haymarket, we next find him a prominent member of Macready's company at Covent Garden, which, as it then also included Mr. Vandenhoff, and, subsequently, Mr. Anderson, was capable of rendering the standard works of our drama with a completeness of effect which, except in the case of one or two seasons of Mr. Webster's Haymarket management, has rarely been approached.

At Covent Garden, Phelps appeared as Leonatus Posthumus in "Cymbeline," as Adrastus in "Ion," as Cassius, and as Macduff. The representation of the former three characters was, however, infrequent. Phelps acquitted himself effectively in all, though in Adrastus, which he repeated at Sadler's Wells, he lacked the stateli-

ness of manner which Vandenhoff had given to it. But in the important character of Macduff his success was signal. In the fourth act, his gradual foreboding of the dismal news to come upon him, the effort, when it came, to maintain fortitude, the burst of overpowering agony, and the sudden appeal to Heaven for an opportunity for vengeance, were rendered with such life and nature as to distance any Macduff I had seen. The convulsed tones of struggling rage and anguish in—

“I shall do so;

But I must also feel it like a man:”

made every soul present a sharer in his grief and his wrongs. The house shook with sympathetic applause. Phelps had found the first opening for the display of those domestic emotions in which he was always at his best.

In 1839, during the recess of the Covent Garden company in Passion Week, he undertook to appear for a benefit at the Victoria Theatre. I happened to be acquainted with Mr. John Heraud,\* who, from the first, had warmly espoused the cause of the new tragedian, with whom he had formed a close friendship. On the evening of the benefit I was invited by Mr.

\* The author of two poems—“The Judgment of the Flood,” and “The Descent into Hell”—which, though their subjects were “*cariare* to the general,” and the poet careless to a fault of consulting popular taste, contain many noble passages. These poems procured him the friendship of Wordsworth, Southey, and Lockhart. His tragedy of “Videna,” which was performed, under the management—honourably emulative of that at Sadler’s Wells—of Mr. W. J. Wallack, at the Marylebone Theatre, was too severe and classical a tragedy, if not for the public in general, at least for the public of Mr. Wallack’s theatre. The high claims of “Videna” were, however, to a great extent recognized by the accomplished critic of the *Times*, the late Mr. John Oxenford. Mr. Heraud died in the spring of 1887.

Heraud to accompany him to the Victoria. The play was "Julius Cæsar;" Warde was the Brutus of the night, Phelps the Cassius, Elton the Mark Antony. In my young judgment, Phelps easily bore off the palm. In the expression of discontent and injury as Cassius, there was mingled with his caustic, fretful tone an impetuosity which indicated "that rash humour which his mother gave him"—made one see that his faults were largely those of impulse, and prepared one for his repentance. Irritable and sensitive characters suited Phelps; but it is just to say thus early that he was often still more successful in expressing tenderness and rugged pathos. On this particular night his Cassius seemed to me the very man; and when I heard that Phelps was to accompany us back to supper, I felt all the elation of a romantic lad of eighteen, who delighted in the theatre, and was brought for the first time into the society of a leading actor. During the drive from the theatre, Mr. Phelps was singularly meditative and abstracted. He seemed for the most part lost in reverie, though he would at times wake out of it to interpose some pithy or pertinent remark. "Why did you not come before the curtain when called for?" asked our host. "Oh, I preferred leaving the honours of the night to Warde," said Phelps, somewhat curtly. Warde was an actor of fair intelligence and vigour, with a thorough knowledge of stage business, and a deep, sonorous voice, of which he made the most. In intellect and feeling he was far below Phelps. The rather contemptuous mention of him by the latter was, perhaps, unduly disappointing to a listener who had not reflected upon the angers that sometimes prevail in exalted minds. The



audience, however, had been singularly noisy, unruly, and boisterous in its applause, the somewhat indiscriminating quality of which had possibly annoyed our tragedian. Eventually he threw off his abstraction, and commented with great intelligence on matters connected with his art, though always maintaining the gravity of his bearing, and displaying, even in the midst of social talk, a tendency to relapse into self-communion. These moods of abstraction and forgetfulness apparently retained their hold on him in later life. During his lessceship of Sadler's Wells, I sent him, at his earnest request, a packet of MSS., with which he was already acquainted. Assuming from my handwriting that he knew the contents of the packet, he neglected to open it at once, laid it aside, and soon forgot it entirely. It happened, however, that a letter had been enclosed which required a prompt answer. As none arrived, after some days a call at his house for explanation followed. It appeared that he had left town on an angling expedition. A month or two passed before I learned that he had hitherto failed to answer my letter for the simple reason that he had only just opened the parcel that contained it.

In the autumn of 1839, Phelps alternated with Macready the characters of Othello and Iago at the Haymarket. The Iago of Phelps, though a painstaking and creditable performance—the exposition of an intellectual and practised actor—could still scarcely be called remarkable. His Othello was an unusually pathetic, even tearful, interpretation of the part. His tenderness and sensibility were very genuine and moving, but, though they interested, they did not greatly

excite, for the simple reason that the performance, though showing deep emotions, showed no corresponding strength of will to resist them. Efforts to do this were made, but with so little energy that the very struggle implied defeat. It should be said, in reservation, however, that the writer saw only Phelps's earlier performances of *Othello*—those up to 1844, inclusive—and that, to so indefatigable a student, any degree of improvement was possible as time advanced. Phelps's *Othello*, however, from the first won more upon the sympathies than did Macready's.

The remark of Hazlitt, that "fortitude is the great essential of a tragic writer," is equally applicable to the tragic actor. We may truly pity the sufferings of feeble or commonplace characters; but it is the proud energy of loftier souls, that combats and restrains their tortures, which compels our admiration. In old days, the unarmed captive, thrown to the lions, would excite, save in the very brutal, mere horror; but the gladiator who had long and gallantly coped with his foe, fell, even when he succumbed, amid shouts. These remarks involve the difference between tragic and domestic pathos. In the opinion of the writer, Mr. Phelps, in spite of his high and various merits, wanted one quality of a great tragic actor, inasmuch as, although he could depict mental suffering with much intensity, he was less successful in depicting the resolution that makes suffering heroic. He had too much judgment and resource to fail signally in any character. Yet it must be confessed that in some of his tragic parts—*Lear* especially—there was a want of masculine strength which his pathetic earnestness hardly redeemed.

That Phelps was even tremulously alive to the emotions he had to represent, is a matter to which the writer had his own testimony. Discussing with him one day the much-agitated point, whether an actor ought to realize the passions and positions of his characters as if they were his own, he exclaimed, "Good Heaven, if I were to do that, I should never be able to act at all! I should simply lose command of my voice and movements altogether. The very thing that I have to fight against is the over-identification of myself with the part." Such a statement by one of the most sensitive of actors would go far to prove, if proof were needful, the truth of Diderot's assertion that the inspiration of the actor does not require—or, indeed, allow—him to feel the emotions of his characters as if they were his own. But, really, this proposition was from the first indisputable. To feel events through imaginative sympathy as if they might happen to us, is widely different from feeling them in experience when they do happen to us. There is high pleasure in the imaginative realization, because the sympathy which connects us even with the sorrows of others is in itself ennobling and expansive, whereas in the actual realization of calamity, pain in the weak and pride in the strong often stifle expression.

We may here record the connection of Mr. Phelps with the movements of a society called "The Syncretics." The professed objects of this body were to recognize the common truths that underlie—or are said to underlie—all creeds and systems, and to found upon such truths a social brotherhood. The practical object which the society had in view was of a narrower kind.

A great number of its members being unacted dramatic poets, this object was to insist upon the merit of their plays, and to press their claims upon theatrical managers. The Syncretics included more than one acted dramatist, of whom Mr. Bayle Bernard was the best known. Amongst those whose works had not at that time been represented, were Mr. R. H. Horne, Mr. J. A. Heraud, Mr. F. G. Tomlins, and Mr. George Stephens, the author of "Martinuzzi." After a while, finding no response to their demands from managers, the Syncretics thought it desirable to take upon themselves the responsibility of a theatrical campaign. Mr. George Stephens was at that time a man of some fortune (afterwards unhappily lost in various speculations), and it was he, I believe, who furnished, in 1841, the means for taking the Lyceum Theatre (then the English Opera House), at which his tragedy of "Martinuzzi" was to be the first production of the society. It proved to be 'the only one. Mr. Phelps, Mr. Elton, Mrs. Warner, and a Miss Maywood, were engaged for the chief parts of the new play, which, to use a phrase then current, was to demonstrate the superiority of the modern unacted drama to the modern acted drama. "Martinuzzi," and the works of one or two other poets of the Syncretic body might, in some respects, have vindicated this contention, for, with the gravest faults of inexperience, and at times of ambitiously obscure diction, they had, at least, loftiness of design, and often imaginative vigour of expression. Their great fault, in addition to the want of technical skill, was that, both in manner and idea, they reflected the style of the Elizabethan dramatists,

and showed little trace of the changes which had since occurred in feeling, opinion, and taste. It is no detraction from even Shakspeare's genius to say that, had he lived in this century, his moral standards and his views of poetic justice would, to some extent, have been modified by new developments of religious thought and social life. To no such influences were the plays of the Syncretics amenable. The plays of Mr. Stephens himself—his "Martinuzzi," and his "Gertrude and Beatrice"—have all, as a critic at the time of their publication declared, "a bold and muscular character about them," but are conceptions based on those of the Elizabethan stage, "stiffened and starched in ruffs and furbelows." When Mr. Stephens ventured, as he subsequently did, into comedy and the drama of modern life, his power had evaporated. This rather long digression may be forgiven concerning a movement which not only caused much interest at the time, but perhaps helped gradually to restore the taste for poetic drama which exists amongst us to-day.

To return to "Martinuzzi." The story is that of a cardinal-minister, who, by imposing a daughter of his own for that of the sovereign, averts a national calamity, yet lives in dread lest his secret should transpire, and the deception which he thought due to his patriotism should be branded as the mere fraud of an ambitious schemer, while during his long inner struggle he is compelled to suppress his yearning love for the child he dares not avow. Owing to the state of the law at the time (when legitimate tragedy and comedy were not allowed to be performed, except at the patent theatres), songs

were introduced, to give the piece the pretext of being a musical entertainment with serious dialogue. And the story had sufficient interest to move a considerable section of the public by the passion and imagination—here and there a little extravagant, perhaps—which it displayed through entire scenes. It would, of course, have been a heresy in a play so sternly legitimate to provide aught of humorous relief. It will be seen that this representative work of the Syncretics was produced under some disadvantages. Nevertheless, the two chief characters (that of Mr. Elton was ineffective and quite unsuitable to him) were so well sustained as to command a fair amount of applause, and to excite much attention amongst those interested in the poetic drama. In the last act, Martinuzzi's soliloquy—partly borrowed from "Titus Andronicus"—

"I must not leave my honours  
Curtailed and lessening in space and time  
When I within the far diviner gloom  
Am wrapt, where lurks no falseness—no distrust,  
Where storm, ambition, wakeful weariness,  
Wrath, envy, travail not; with whose blind depths  
Only God's eye is level, and where nothing  
Reigns save what is not, save, on every side,  
Darkness and silence and eternal sleep,"

was given by Mr. Phelps with a solemnity that riveted the house; while his appeal to his daughter—

"Oh, child!  
Stab not with parricidal hands the being  
Whose pangs are locked—or should be locked—in blood  
Which flows within thy veins. Indeed, thou know'st not  
How much he merits at thy filial hands—  
His love, his providence, those thoughts which night  
Doth shut down in her casket, and God opens,  
His ceaseless orisons, forestalling thine,  
His anxious guidance, his undying cares,"

might have been delivered with more majesty, but scarcely with more tenderness or with accents more touching in their faltering emotion. Mrs. Warner, too, was excellent as the mother of the Prince whose rights had been usurped. It is quite possible that the interest which this forcible, though crude production aroused, together with the association in the experiment of Phelps and Mrs. Warner, may have had its share in bringing about that noble management of a small Islington theatre in which the best memories and hopes of the British stage were alike maintained, when all but a "fit few" seemed to have forgotten their existence.

In 1841 Macready began his Drury Lane campaign, and Phelps once more enlisted under his banner. At Drury Lane he performed the same class of parts as at Covent Garden. He acted with great effect the part of Hubert in "King John." The scene with Prince Arthur was a great success. Hubert's burst of repentant grief—

"Well, see to live; I will not touch thine eyes  
For all the treasure that thine uncle owes:"

moved many to tears.

On one occasion, at Drury Lane, Phelps took, through some difference between the dramatist and Macready, the part intended for the latter. The play was Browning's tragedy, "A Blot on the Scutcheon." Stimulated by this opportunity, Phelps went beyond himself. In the recoil of the rash brother from the dishonour of his house, he seemed as one *possessed* by passion. Pride raged in him like a demon; his features were convulsed, his gestures wild, his voice charged with sardonic hatred and scorn; while his despair,



after slaying the betrayer of his sister, was strangely moving by its heart-broken quietude. In this character I have been told by admirers of the elder Kean that he vividly recalled that inspired tragedian. Here, and subsequently in Melantius in "The Bridal," and in Arbaces in "King and No King"—all three plays being revived at Sadler's Wells—he rose into tragic passion and exaltation, as distinct from pathos and excited feeling.

While acting with Macready, however, the chance of appearing in a leading part could be only occasional. It is necessary to follow him to Sadler's Wells, before we can fairly judge of his powers and the extent of them. This theatre he opened with "Macbeth," on May 27, 1844. His Macbeth was a very careful performance, somewhat over-laboured, wanting in the sense of the supernatural, and showing more excitability than masculine vigour. It was, however, thoroughly thought out and suggestive, while the actor's unmistakable earnestness, fine declamation, and experience of the stage, commended it amply to his public.

In Lear he was very successful on the pathetic side of the character. His indignant and convulsive grief was harrowing; it came from and went to the heart. In his irony extremes met, and misery laughed and jested. But, with much of the outraged father, there was little of the king. With Phelps, Lear's sufferings and madness excited compassion, but not awe. His bearing lacked something of what Kent ascribes to it—"authority"—as his distracted rage lacked the contrast of restraint when it gathered, and of volume when it broke. The "mind o'erthrown"

found its likeness in some tottering edifice, which arrests one by its antiquity and decay, but bears nowhere the half-effaced escutcheon which gives dignity to ruin. As Hamlet—a personage whom he did not look—Phelps gave with great force the direct invectives of the part—the soliloquy, for instance, beginning—

“Oh, what a rogue and peasant-slave am I!”

but much of the assumed levity, which really argues the deepest melancholy, he delivered as if it were mere comedy. He quizzed Polonius, for instance, and in the early scenes bandied repartees with the spies as if for amusement, and to beguile the time. I never saw a Hamlet so quaintly droll, or who commanded such bursts of laughter. Of course, in so thoughtful an actor, there was design in all this. It seemed as if he had adopted the theory of Hamlet's madness, and had intended in this state to present the vagaries of insanity.

Another of his fine parts was Timon. The recoil to misanthropy of a generous nature, whose trust has been betrayed, gave opportunities which he turned to the best account. He was, in short, fine in those over-sensitive characters which are inordinate alike in their affection and in the bitterness of affection deceived. When actuated by the latter feeling, his invective was full of nature and variety. It had now the fierceness, now the mocking raillery, now the bitter calm so often found in life, when morbid sensibility of temperament mingles with passion. Much cannot be said for his Coriolanus. He was too impetuous and excitable for the man who stood in lofty disdain of his kind—

"As if a man were author of himself,  
And knew no other kin."

His Mark Antony, in "Antony and Cleopatra," wanted grace and the romantic ardour of passion. His Brutus in "Julius Cæsar" was excellent—nobly calm, firm, and tender. One would have said, beforehand, it was hardly a character for Phelps, who succeeded so admirably in the irritable and restless Cassius. It may have been that his fine personation of Brutus was due to his having contrasted him at every point with his fellow-conspirator. His Henry the Fourth, in the second part of the play bearing that title, had a careful and telling, though by no means a servile, resemblance to Macready in the same character.

In modern parts, his Richelieu and Werner were, again, good, but somewhat pale reflections of the tragedian just named. It is just to say, however, that both these studies were so highly finished, and their effective points so skilfully brought out, that they were only surpassed by those of the original master. As Melantius, there was an electricity in his passion, and a breadth in his style, which he seldom exhibited in the same degree. Virginius, again, was one of his best serious parts. Though following the lines of Macready, he had evidently made the part his own by sympathy with the fond and agonized father. His impersonation of Bertuccio, in "The Fool's Revenge"—the late Mr. Tom Taylor's version of "*Le Roi s'amuse*"—was also one of his most signal achievements. Bertuccio suited him at every point—in the bitter sense of wrong, in the poisoned sarcasms darted, as if in sport, by the hand of the jester, in the

passionate strength of paternal love, and in the revulsion of horror at finding his daughter ensnared in the trap meant for another. Here dignity and masculine self-control were not needed. The cunning, the hate, and the affection of the over-sensitive Bertuccio, have something of feminine swiftness and poignancy, as distinguished usually from the same qualities in man. The acting of Phelps satisfied every demand of the character.

I may here record my own debt to him. Neither in respect of appearance nor of age was he well suited to the part of Mordaunt in "The Patrician's Daughter." Nevertheless, he threw such reality into the pride, indignation, and repentance of the intentionally morbid hero, that my juvenile work became a stock-piece at his theatre.

Phelps was an actor of such trained intellect and varied means, that even in absolute tragedy—that which excites terror and strong passion, as well as pity—his acting was always impressive and suggestive. It is true that, in tragedy of this kind, he did not always rise to the height of his opportunity. He did so, as has been said, in Browning's Lord Tresham, in Melantius, and in the passion of Arbaces—a soul-fever which preyed upon him and wasted him; but he was excellent in domestic tragedy—in parts that give scope for the display of warm attachment or pathos; in those, too, that exhibit the morbid bitterness of wounded feeling. It may be doubted, however, whether what was most characteristic of the actor—what most distinguished him from other performers—was to be found chiefly in his graver impersonations. To my

thinking, it was in comedy—often eccentric comedy—that he most frequently shone. He was at his very best in the keen analysis of human weakness—in happy and credulous vanity, in the dry raillery that satirizes human failings and inconsistencies, in the crabbed regrets and fretting apprehensions of age, and in the obsequiousness which sees through and despises those whom it flatters.

Of the latter characteristics, his Sir Pertinax MacSycophant appears to have been his most highly-coloured embodiment. In this part the cupidity that shrank from no meanness rose almost to the intensity of tragedy, while an expression of scrutinizing, yet stealthy vigilance on the actor's face was the outward symbol of his crafty rapacity and eagerness to seize his opportunities.

As Malvolio, his conceit, exaltation, and profound contempt of others were admirably true. His set and abstracted look seemed to ignore the existence of those whom he despised. The picture of fatuous vanity was thoroughly incisive, and yet free from exaggeration. He moved and looked with an air of satisfied isolation amongst his fellow-men, as if he had been in some sort a Coriolanus of comedy. He was only inferior to Farren in this part because he stopped short at superciliousness; whereas the latter comedian rose at times to a height of self-complacency, full of pitying tolerance for his inevitable inferiors—tolerance too serene to be disturbed by stooping to contempt.

In like manner, the Sir Peter Teazle of Phelps, though it did not attain the distinction, or show the delicately significant touches and finish of

Farren's, was, after his, the most forcible and graphic on the recent stage. The differing phases of the character were filled in with the nicest judgment, and with extraordinary variety of manner. Sir Peter's mirth on discovering Joseph Surface's fallibility, was an admirable instance of the additional effect which genuine feeling gains by restraint.

This actor's Falstaff hardly conformed to the general ideal. In the first place, he lacked unction. Capons had not mollified him into lazy enjoyment, and, to judge from his humour, his sack must have been extra dry. On the other hand, there was a pith, a touch of Yankee 'cuteness in the delivery of the fat knight's dialogue, that in time began to tell. If much of Falstaff's self-enjoyment was missing, it was atoned for by so much phlegm, by such an air of caustic shrewdness in his comments, and of ease and conviction in his mendacity, that, by the time the Prince and Poins tear to pieces his bragging lies, and expose his cowardice, Phelps's dry, self-possessed effrontery convulsed his hearers as much as if it had been the overflow of animal spirits and humour. His answer to the Prince's charge of running away from the attack—"By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye," given with a cool, matter-of-fact expectation that the monstrous lie would at once be swallowed, was as mirth-provoking as the air of triumph in ready resources which other Falstaffs have displayed in this emergency. In the last act, the dissertation on the worthlessness of honour, and the conclusion that "discretion is the better part of valour," though wanting in self-complacency, seemed to emanate from a mind

so penetrated by their truth, that the gravity of their delivery was probably more mirth-provoking than obvious humour would have been. Jovial, luxurious, lazily delighting in jest and in creature comforts, or exulting in braggadocio and quick expedients, the Falstaff of Phelps was not, or, at least, not more than the language of Shakspeare forced him to be; but, as a shrewd soul who has mastered what he deems the truth—that self-interest is everything—who has an unbounded invention in extolling or excusing himself, a fairly sociable turn, with not an atom of ill-nature, the same amount of conscience, and a large proportion of Dutch phlegm in his system, this Falstaff was as effective as it was unique. Nevertheless, it is probable that the admirers of an “unctuous Falstaff” would greatly exceed those of Phelps’s dry and somewhat sarcastic exposition.

To some other characters, however, his dryness of treatment was admirably suited. The calm self-conceit of his Bottom, who finds so many things within his range, because his ignorance conceals their difficulties, was far more humorous than if his vanity had been made broader and more boisterous. His absolute insensibility to the ridiculous was more mirth-moving than the most grotesque means by which inferior actors would have italicised the absurd conceit of the character. His quiet, matter-of-course belief that the parts of Thisbe and the Lion are equally within his grasp, and that, as to the latter, he could roar, with equal success, either “terribly,” or “as gently as any sucking dove,” was more telling than would have been a violent and highly-coloured expression of his self-complacency.



The same may be said of his air of contented superiority in contriving means to protect the ladies from fears of the drawn sword and of the lion in the play, of his ready assumption of the ass's head, of his light fingering of it, as if it had been the most natural of head-gears, and his satisfaction with his own wit in fathoming and baffling the designs of Puck, who had imposed it. In all this, the sense of acquiescence in the absurd was far more ludicrous than extreme wonder or excitement would have been. As a picture of intense self-conceit, expressed generally rather by signs of inward relish of his acuteness than by more open display—of ridiculous fastidiousness and equally ridiculous devices to satisfy it—as a parody of sense and ingenuity by a shallow brain,—Bottom must be ranked as one of this actor's most original conceptions.

Short, comparatively, as is the part of Justice Shallow (which Phelps was wont to double with that of Henry IV., in the second part of the play so named), his rendering of it was strikingly individual and impressive. Bottom, though very human in his foibles, is in some degree a fantastic creation. He is the sport of the fairies, and belongs to the comic side of a preternatural drama. But Justice Shallow is not only a man but a most typical man, representing that vast class of the old, whose joys lie all in memory, who try hard to ignore the near future which scarcely veils death, and has dismay for all whose days are not "bound to each other by natural piety." What a lean, hungry, restless look had this Justice as his time-chilled life strove to warm itself by recollections of youth, and to protract youth itself by still affecting its impulses

and its pranks. "You were called lusty Shallow, then," says Silence to the lean Justice—lusty in muscle and vigour, he must have meant, not in bulk—who had spent so many "mad days," and so many of whose old acquaintances were dead. But, for all that, Shallow will vaunt that he was a "swinge-buckler" in the Inns of Court; he will put off the thought of death by talk of "a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair," and when he hears that old Double is dead, he will affect good spirits, recall him as a fine shot, and ask the price of a score of ewes. And yet how fully, through this feigned indifference, Phelps made one feel that the dismal thought of old Double ran like a persistent knell on a road alive with traffic. "And is old Double dead?" repeats Shallow, with a feeling that the ugly thought must be got rid of. So he will try blithely to welcome Bardolph, who heralds Falstaff; for he knew Falstaff of old, and the knight thrives and is really lusty, which is good cheer; so he will merrily quibble with Bardolph on the word "accommodated," delightedly welcome the knight himself, and press his hospitality upon him; for who would lose such a specific against low spirits, for which, indeed, there may be good enough cause? Ah, how the actor jested! How he revelled in Falstaff's puns, while the men on the roll were pricked for service! With what feverish mirth he renewed with the old knight the mad escapades of youth. There shall be no thought of old age or what it portends. Give way, dismal spectre! Such are my recollections of Phelps's Justice Shallow, and of the moral impression which it left; while the various phases of the man—his dreary libertine vaunts, his

clinging to life and yearning for distraction against ugly thoughts, and the overdone merriment which could not cloak his apprehensions—were delivered with that ease and precision of expression—just to the finest *nuance*—which he had so happily cultivated in comedy; the garrulity of age, accompanied by what may be called an air of rustic courtliness, giving fresh individuality to the part.

In Falstaff's soliloquy in Act III., is a curious remark about the addiction of old men to lying—a failing of which the knight admits himself to be an example. He judges Shallow's lies, however, less leniently than his own, regarding them as mere brag for self-glorification. They are, perhaps, half unconscious, and meant to feed that warmth of memory from which, in life's winter, Shallow seeks comfort. Falstaff, likely enough, scorns lying of this sort, which is purely egoistic and in the interest of the liar—very different, therefore from his more genial mendacity, which, if resorted to at first for excuse or defence, soon became a glow of sympathetic invention, so that he piled up his fables as much for his own delight as to baffle his accusers—the delight of making such good running, and doubling so adroitly before his keen pursuers.

In the majority of characters that have been noticed, Phelps did not appear—at least, in London—until he entered on the management of Sadler's Wells Theatre, in 1844. Both Mrs. Warner and Mr. Greenwood were associated with him in this enterprise; but, in all intellectual respects, his control was supreme. After a few years he became nominally, as well as virtually, sole manager.

It is difficult now to realize the almost hopeless condition to which our legitimate drama had been reduced when he took command of the Islington Theatre. Bunn had some years before proclaimed (and facts certainly corroborated him) that the production of a new play meant empty houses. So well-constructed a play as Mr. Lovell's "Provost of Bruges," for instance, with Macready in the chief character, was played to the scantiest of audiences. With the exception of the brief excitement produced by Charles Kean's reappearance at Drury Lane, in 1837 (in all essentials his *début*), Shakspeare, fairly cast, had been a pecuniary failure, though melodrama and opera, assisted by ballet and spectacle, had fairly held their ground. Subsequently, Macready's noble efforts at Covent Garden and "The Lane" had procured for him simply the admiration of a public too small to return the heavy expenses of his management. On its cessation, three of his lieutenants, Phelps, Vandenhoff, and Anderson, appeared at Covent Garden, under the management of Mr. H. Wallack, but with the most disheartening results. When the greatest tragedian of his time, surrounded by the best company that could be collected, had been obliged to retire from central London, for any other actor to unfurl the banner of legitimacy in a mere suburb might have seemed an attempt to the last degree desperate. The unsophisticated people of Islington, however, found in legitimate drama, with Mr. Phelps and Mrs. Warner in leading parts, and supported by an adequate company, charms which the *blasé* loungers from the clubs and good society in general were

wont at the time to regard with supercilious apathy.

Sadler's Wells opened, under the management of Mr. Phelps and Mrs. Warner, on May 27, 1844, with the tragedy of "Macbeth." Phelps, of course, appeared as the guilty Thane, and Mrs. Warner as Lady Macbeth. Mr. H. Marston was the Macduff, Mr. T. H. Lacy the Banquo; while for so small a part as that of "The Gentlewoman attending Lady Macbeth," the services of that sterling actress, Mrs. H. Marston, were secured. A week later "Othello" was performed, with Phelps as the Moor, Mr. H. Marston as Iago, Miss Cooper (Mrs. T. H. Lacy) as Desdemona, and Mrs. Warner as Emilia. In course of time the strength of the Sadler's Wells staff was importantly increased; but, even at the outset, it presented a combination of ability to which the Islingtonians had, up to that period, been strangers. A company by which standard plays could be satisfactorily performed, a *mise en scène* emulating that of Macready at the large houses—picturesque and suggestive, but never obtrusively asserting itself over the acting—soon riveted the attention of the Northern suburb and gradually that of entire London. The Islington paterfamilias perceived that he had at his door a source of healthy and intellectual pleasure which the West End could not rival—nay, which at that date it could scarcely be said to present. As one great legitimate work followed another, the attractions of the little theatre spread, until it became a sort of pilgrim's shrine to the literary men of London, to the younger members of the Inns of Court, and to those denizens of the West in whom poetic taste still

lingered. In the audience itself there seemed a parallel, in those dark days of the drama, between the adherents of the poetic school and the adherents of a proscribed faith in religion. A respectful, almost solemn hush pervaded the house during the less exciting scenes of a play, while the applause when a telling situation occurred conveyed something far beyond the usual tribute to an actor's skill. There was a fervour of demonstration to the chief performers (especially in the case of Phelps) which meant the recognition of great services. I have heard the execution of some passage in a tragedy hailed with something of the excitement which might have followed a political manifesto. The tenants of the pit would spring up from their seats, gaze at each other in delight, and gesticulate their admiration. It was felt that there was a *Cause*, scarcely less than sacred, to support, and that Phelps was its apostle. At times, though rarely, the enthusiasm of the gallery or the pit found vent in apostrophes, such as, "Splendid, Phelps—splendid!" or, in later times, when a rival tragedian had assumed rule at the Princess's, "Ah! where's Charlie Kean now?"

My opportunities of meeting Mr. Phelps in private were not frequent. On these occasions he remained the same grave, musing companion which I had found him on the night when we were introduced. In the course of one evening which he spent with me, I read to him a play of my own. To this he listened with an attention and sympathy which, from one usually so abstracted, could not but be gratifying. "I am quite willing to produce this piece," he said at the close; "but, let me say, you would never have

got Macready to produce it." "Why?" I asked. "Because the woman has the pull." I could not help smiling, for I had already sounded Macready as to the piece in question, telling him frankly that its interest and effect were fairly divided between the hero and heroine. "Ah," said he, "I have many a time divided the chief interests of a piece with others"—he referred especially to the plays of Shiel and Barry Cornwall—"but at this stage of my career I must be the central figure. All the greatest plays, from 'Edipus' to 'Lear' and 'Hamlet' evolve only one main idea through one main character." Many other great plays, from the "Agamemnon" to "Macbeth," might have been cited against this *dictum*; but it was easy to understand that a great actor, towards the close of his career, might well desire to be always the focus of attraction. With regard to my own play, "Philip of France and Marie de Meranie," Mr. Phelps and I failed to come to terms. Some time afterwards the piece was produced at the Olympic, then under the management of the late Mr. William Farren, where my heroine received from Miss Helen Faucit an interpretation of so much womanly tenderness and imaginative beauty as to console me for my regretted failure with the lessee of "The Wells."

A year or two later, at the instance of Mr. Phelps, I undertook a new play for him. The piece was absolutely a commission, on terms that I did not think very advantageous to myself. A difficulty, nevertheless, occurred on its completion, from an impression on his part that a secondary character was more important than his own. The performance was consequently



delayed until his retirement from the theatre, when, as a compromise, the piece—"Pure Gold"—was by our mutual consent transferred to his successors, Mr. Henry Marston appearing in the part meant for Mr. Phelps, Mr. Edmund Phelps personating the secondary character, and Miss Marriott the heroine.

It would have been pleasant, however, to me to know that I had, in any degree, been associated with a management second only to that of Macready in its services to the higher form of drama, and, in respect to the difficulties overcome, more remarkable even than his.

Of Shakspeare's plays, Mr. Phelps produced not only all that are best known, but some which, so far as the stage is concerned, had long been laid aside. Amongst these were "All's Well that Ends Well," "The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth," "Pericles," "Comedy of Errors," and "Love's Labour's Lost." "Richard the Third," and, ultimately, "Macbeth," he gave with the restoration of Shakspeare's text, going so far, in the latter tragedy, as to make his exit as Macbeth "fighting," while the bringing in of the head of the usurper, and Macduff's greeting of Malcolm as king concluded the tragedy. To relinquish the usual close, in which the death of Macbeth in his desperate fight with Macduff concentrates attention on the former, was a piece of self-sacrifice, from an actor's point of view, that cannot well be overrated.

Of Shakspeare's plays, with the exceptions of "Richard the Second," "Titus Andronicus," "Troilus and Cressida," and the three parts of "King Henry the Sixth," all were acted on the Sadler's Wells stage within the brief space of

eighteen years and a half. No other theatre can boast such a record. His farewell benefit took place November 6, 1862, when he played Brutus in "Julius Cæsar."

Amongst the most remarkable of the Shaksperian revivals was "Antony and Cleopatra," not only for beauty of production and general adequacy of cast, but for the striking impersonation of the Egyptian Queen by Miss Glyn, who portrayed the changing moods of Cleopatra—her caprice and jealousy, her pride, luxury, and prodigal fancy—with delightful spontaneousness, while she abandoned herself to the death which is to reunite her to Antony with a smiling and eager majesty that converted it into a triumph. The harmony which Miss Glyn effected between so many lighter moods and the imperial dignity of her more tragic passages, especially that of her death, was surprisingly fine. In coquetry, in arger, in cunning, in subjugation, and in her royal end, she was still the same Cleopatra. The play had a long run—the longest of any that Phelps produced at "The Wells." During Miss Glyn's triumph in Cleopatra, I recalled the morning when I and another friend had accompanied her to the stage of Sadler's Wells, where she was to go through a few recitations, on the effect of which depended her engagement. They were chiefly, if memory serves me, from Constance in "King John." Phelps's reticence—almost taciturnity on this occasion—was somewhat mortifying to the lady's friends. But the manager was as wise as he was wary, and Miss Glyn's appearance at the theatre soon followed the trial of her capacity.

Of original dramas produced by Mr. Phelps at

Sadler's Wells, I am able, through the friendly pains of Mr. W. E. Church, to furnish the following list, believed to be complete:—

Title.	Date of Production.	Authors.
Priest's Daughter.	Jan. 30, 1845.	Serle.
*King's Friend.	May 21, 1845.	Sullivan.
Florentines.	June 2, 1845.	Anon.
Judge Jeffreys.	April 15, 1846.	Spicer.
Feudal Times.	Feb. 18, 1847.	White.†
John Saville of Haystead.	Nov. 3, 1847.	White.
Calaynos.	May 10, 1849.	Boker.‡
Garcia.	Dec. 12, 1869.	F. G. Tomlins.§
Retribution.	Feb. 4, 1850.	G. Bennett.
James VI.; or, Gowrie Plot.	March 10, 1852.	White.
Might and Right.	Dec. 8, 1852.	Anon.
Hamilton of Bothwell.	Feb. 24, 1855.	Selous.
Fool's Revenge.	Oct. 15, 1859.	Tom Taylor.

Exclusive of Shaksperian plays, those revived at Sadler's Wells by Mr. Phelps included "The Bridal" (Sheridan Knowles's version of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Evadne"), the "King and No King" of the same authors, Massinger's "Fatal Dowry," Webster's "Duchess of Malfi," adapted by Mr. R. H. Horne, author of "Cosmo de Medicis," "An Honest Man's Fortune," also

\* A play with excellent comic situations. It would well bear revival. The author, Mr. Sullivan, also wrote "The Beggar on Horseback," produced at the Haymarket.

† The Rev. Mr. White, who also wrote "The King of the Commons," in which Macready appeared at the Princess's.

‡ An American dramatist.

§ This play has not only strong situations, but the true spirit of tragedy. To save the life of a mother, Garcia takes that of a base, ungrateful, and proscribed villain, who has repayed her for preserving him by denouncing her. Ultimately the mother is saved, irrespective of Garcia's unnecessary crime, remorse for which is his terrible punishment. Mr. Tomlins, the writer, was one of the most witty and genial companions of his time, and widely popular.

|| This play, being an adaptation from Victor Hugo, can hardly be called original. It contains, however, original matter by the adapter.

adapted by Mr. Horne, "The Castle Spectre," "The Man of the World," "The Clandestine Marriage;" and, of more modern pieces, Leigh Hunt's "Legend of Florence," Browning's "Blot on the Scutcheon," and Marston's "Patrician's Daughter."

During this memorable management of Sadler's Wells, there appeared, in addition to Phelps himself, the following well-known performers—Mrs. Warner, Miss Cooper, Miss Laura Addison, Miss Glyn, Miss Atkinson, Mrs. Charles Young (now Mrs. Hermann Vezin), Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Henry Marston, Mr. Creswick, Mr. Henry Marston, Mr. George Bennett, Mr. Ray, Mr. Lewis Ball, etc.

After resigning the direction of Sadler's Wells, Mr. Phelps entered upon various engagements at Drury Lane, the Gaiety, the Queen's Theatre, in Long Acre, the Imperial, etc. On one occasion, in 1869, he returned to Sadler's Wells to fulfil a brief engagement. He continued, indeed, to perform until 1878, the year of his death.

A management which, at a small suburban theatre, could produce so brilliant a succession of standard English plays, and enlist for their representation talent so great and varied, and this at a period when the public was, for the most part, apathetic as to the drama, must be held to have rendered services which should never be forgotten. It is to be regretted that those of Mr. Phelps, though warmly recognized by intellectual playgoers, scarcely obtained the formal tribute to which they were entitled. On the Shakspeare Tercentenary, in 1863, he was invited to plant an oak in the poet's honour on Primrose Hill.\*

\* I believe the authorities at this time sanctioned a change of name, and that Primrose Hill was thenceforth intended to

Accompanying him with others on that occasion, I had the pleasure of witnessing his enthusiastic welcome on the way, and the pleasure it afforded him. He was beloved of the people; but not for him, so far as I know, were public dinners, presentations of plate, and receptions presided over by the illustrious or noble. Geography has a limiting effect upon distinctions of this kind, and devotion to a great cause, if shown at Islington, finds Willis's Rooms guarded by surly janitors. Spite of this, the obligations of the Stage to Samuel Phelps as a manager will become a lasting portion of its history. What those obligations were may be gathered from what has already been stated. As an actor it is doubtful whether the width of his range has ever been exceeded. Once more, if he did not always reach the heights of passion—there were times when he did so—his exposition of great tragic parts was still invariably impressive, thoroughly studied, and intellectual. If in some serious characters, as in *Macbeth*, his effect was obtained gradually, rather than by brilliant surprises; yet in certain parts already named—Lord Tresham in "*The Blot on the Scutcheon*," *Melantius*, and *Arbaces*—his reality and intensity rose into genius. All three characters, it may be observed, had suffered from wrong or, at least, from opposition, and these seemed in some degree requisite to rouse Phelps to his utmost fervour. To excite his full passion, he needed the kindling power of indignation.

The above remarks, of course, refer to characters of spirit and excitement—not to those of pathos,

be called Shakspeare's Hill. But the great mass of Londoners refused to adopt the privilege of this new nomenclature.

in which he always excelled. He was a master of pathos, as in some scenes of *Lear*, in *Brutus*, in *Macduff*, and in *Virginius*. He could express antipathy no less effectively than the sympathy of which it is often the recoil, as in *Timon*. He was admirable in excitable, irritable impetuous moods, like those of *Cassius*. How keen an eye he had for the detection of human meannesses his *Sir Pertinax* will attest. In some chief characters of comedy, Phelps, dry though he was, was inferior to no contemporary actor but the elder *Farren*. In certain parts of Shaksperian humour, such as *Bottom* and *Justice Shallow*—in his power to blend fantastic conceit with shrewdness, and to dash the vaunt of the withered libertine with the grim sense of all mortal fate—he was alone.

In person, Phelps was somewhat tall and spare, with an ample forehead. He managed to throw much expression into his face, in spite of the closeness of his eyes to each other and their want of marked colour. His voice, though deep and powerful, wanted at times variety in serious delivery.\* The defect was less frequent and less noticeable in comedy.

In private Mr. Phelps seems to have shown all the domestic virtues—to have been a model husband and father, and, though dry and reserved in his manner, to have had the power of inspiring

\* In his later days he fell occasionally into a somewhat conventional delivery of blank verse—into the measured and monotonous tone of one who has studied his matter so often that, though he pronounces it with judgment, it fails to revive its first vital impression upon himself. It was heretofore a charm in Phelps, as in *Macready* to the last, that one often saw look and gesture express thought and emotion before they were uttered.

warm attachments. On these points, as well as upon his public career, much light is thrown by Mr. John Coleman's interesting and graphic life of him, and that also of Messrs. May Phelps and John Forbes Robertson.

Worn out by his long and honourable labours, consciousness forsook this valued actor while he was uttering Wolsey's farewell to his greatness, during an engagement at the Imperial Theatre. He never returned to the stage. Strength gradually ebbed away, and he breathed his last on November 6, 1872, in his seventy-fifth year.



## CHAPTER XII.

## THE SADLER'S WELLS COMPANY IN GENERAL.

Mr. Creswick, subsequently an emissary of Shakspeare to the South-East, as Phelps was to North London—Mr. Henry Marston—His *debut* at Drury Lane, in 1839—His performances at Sadler's Wells under Phelps—His Clarence in "Richard the Third"—His Gabor in "Werner," Ghost in "Hamlet," Benedick in "Much Ado about Nothing," and Apemantus in "Timon of Athens"—Mr. Marston in a play by author, originally designed for Phelps—Marston's private character, taste, etc.—His idolatry of Shakspeare—His eloquence—He occasionally condescends to a jest—Instance of this—His long illness and death—Mrs. Henry Marston—Douglas Jerrold's admiration of her Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet"—Mr. G. K. Dickinson—Mr. F. Robinson—Mr. Hoskins—Mr. Edmund Phelps—Miss Laura Addison—She first appears at Sadler's Wells as Mabel in "The Patrician's Daughter"—Appears afterwards in Pauline, Juliet, Mrs. Haller, Isabella ("Fatal Marriage"), Mrs. Beverley, Isabella ("Measure for Measure")—Her qualifications as an actress—"Feudal Times," by Rev. James White—Miss Addison goes to the Haymarket in 1848—Impressions of her in private—Her death in America, in 1852—Miss Fitzpatrick—She appears at Sadler's Wells, in 1849, as Letitia Hardy in "The Belle's Stratagem," Constance in "The Love Chase," and Miss Hardecastle in "She Stoops to Conquer"—Her elegance and spirit—She quits Sadler's Wells and appears at Drury Lane—Mr. George Bennett—His capacities and personal appearance—Characters most suited to him—His Bessus in "A King or No King"—His Bosola in "The Duchess of Malfi"—His Caliban—His death—Miss Cooper—As Lydia in "The Love Chase," Aspatia in "The Bridal," Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—Her acting delicate, but too sentimental—She dies, aged fifty-three, in 1872—Miss Atkinson—Mr. Ray—Mr. Lewis Ball.

APART from Phelps and Mrs. Warner, a few names of those who supported the former in the course of his long suburban management claim special record. According to the plan of this work, no mention, except incidental, will be made of well-known actors or actresses yet living. Thus, Mr. Creswick, Mr. and Mrs. Hermann Vezin, and Miss Glyn will have no special mention here, though they were amongst the most important members of the Sadler's Wells company, and gained yet higher distinction after seceding from it, Mr. Creswick becoming to transpontine London an apostle of Shakspeare, as Phelps was to North London.

Amongst the names to which we are restricted, that of the late Mr. Henry Marston was conspicuous. This actor made his first appearance as Benedick at Drury Lane, in 1839, the theatre being then under the management of Mr. W. J. Hammond. Graceful, cultivated, and intelligent, Mr. Marston made an impression which would have been still more favourable but for a huskiness of voice, which was a great drawback in the characters of gallants and lovers. He performed few characters under Macready, whom he joined at Drury Lane, but at Sadler's Wells his name was constantly in the bills. On the revival of "Richard the Third" at Sadler's Wells, under Phelps, from the original text, Mr. Marston distinguished himself in the part of Clarence, and gave the dream with the skilled elocution of a follower of the Kembles, if with a trifle too much of the attitudinizing which was now become old-fashioned. For a long time at Sadler's Wells he sustained the range of character next in importance to the first. He was

the Iago, the Macduff, the Faulconbridge, the Mark Antony, the Jaffier of the theatre. I saw him on one occasion play Gabor in the tragedy of "Werner," and thought it one of his best characters. In the scene where he denounces Ulric as the murderer of Stralenheim, his manner of gradually sounding Werner before accosting his son—the blending, in a word, of caution with resolution, and the frank, passionless, yet incisive relation of the facts that bring home Werner's guilt, was a masterly exposition of the bold but wary adventurer, who, though he will not himself stoop to crime, is willing at need to profit by its concealment. From the first there was an air of observation about him, and a quiet reserve in his manner, which impressed one with the notion of a man who probably knew more than he chose to convey. Marston's Ghost in "Hamlet" was also an excellent performance. Without forfeiting the supernatural character of the apparition, he infused into the retrospect of his earthly life a melancholy sweetness which was as affecting as it was unusual. His Benedick was very spirited and graceful, though it suffered unavoidably from the vocal defect already noticed. As Apemantus in "Timon of Athens," he gave the biting retorts of the misanthropic philosopher with unforced point and excellent effect.

I had accepted a commission from Mr. Phelps to write a new play for Sadler's Wells. Before the piece, entitled "Pure Gold," could be produced, the fortunes of the theatre had begun to ebb. Phelps retired from the management; his rights in the new play were transferred to his successors. The character intended for him—

that of a father, whom an undeserved stigma separates from his daughter—was, under these circumstances, allotted to Mr. H. Marston, who performed it, if not with all those quick touches of simple pathos with which Phelps could surprise the heart, yet with great feeling, taste, and dignity.

During the rehearsal of the piece in question the writer's previous knowledge of Mr. Marston deepened into closer acquaintanceship. The amiable and high-toned nature of this actor, and his union of courtesy with sincerity, were eminently winning, while conversation revealed his cultivated taste, his intimate knowledge of the Elizabethan dramatists, and an affectionate reverence for Shakspeare that was little short of worship. More than once, on a twenty-third of April, I have heard him descant upon the genius of the great dramatist in language the just insight of which was equal to its enthusiasm. Mr. Marston was, indeed, an accomplished orator. He knew at once how to instruct and to move while his finished elocution gave a last charm to his discourse. He seldom adopted the humorous familiarities to which speakers of our day so often resort. With him all was stately, earnest, and impassioned. He could appreciate a jest, however, and was capable of uttering one. At a dramatic gathering one night, Mr. Edgar, the then lessee of Sadler's Wells, was expatiating, not without warrant, upon the claims of his wife, known to the public as Miss Marriot. "But I am forgetting myself," said the worthy husband, with an unconscious disparagement of his spouse that he would have been the first to regret. "Every man, I suppose, thinks his own goose

a swan." "Very right that you should hold your wife a swan," said Marston, alluding to the well-known firm of drapers. "It's a capital union, that of Swan and Edgar." In his late years Mr. Marston suffered so severely from rheumatism, that he was a prisoner to his house. He bore the pain and tedium of his malady with sweet fortitude, and at length passed away amid such regrets as only the few inspire.

An allusion may be permitted here to his widow, Mrs. Henry Marston, who, some years since, quitted the stage, and died in 1887. She was an excellent actress in Mrs. Glover's line of parts. On one occasion in which we were interested in the Juliet of a *débutante*, I saw her, in company with Jerrold, play the Nurse. "How admirable was Mrs. Marston!" cried he; "nearly as fine a Nurse as Mrs. Glover. Certainly the best after her."

As to the juvenile heroes of tragedy and comedy, the most prominent for some time were G. K. Dickinson, Mr. F. Robinson, and Mr. Hoskins, the two former graceful actors wanting in force, of which the last possessed a reasonable share, though he lacked refinement. All three were inferior to Mr. Edmund Phelps, son of the lessee, who appeared as Ulric to his father's Werner, in the autumn of 1860. Without any claim to originality, young Phelps had considerable advantages of person and voice, and so much energy and intelligence as soon enabled him to fill satisfactorily the parts usually assigned to a *jeune premier*. His death took place in 1870, at the early age of thirty-two.

Miss Laura Addison, who, after the retirement of Mrs. Warner, became leading actress of Sadler's

Wells, made her first appearance there, being then, it is said, still in her teens, as Lady Mabel Lynterne in the tragedy of "The Patrician's Daughter," in August, 1846. In the course of the season she performed Pauline, Juliet, Mrs. Haller, Isabella (in "The Fatal Marriage"), Mrs. Beverley, Isabella (in "Measure for Measure"), Portia, and Belvidera. Miss Addison, with no great advantages of figure, had a fair complexion, a prepossessing face, with great force of expression, especially in grief and tenderness. She was gifted, moreover, with a sweet and pathetic voice, admirably suited to utterance of these sentiments. Unsophisticated and sincere, she carried the listener away by her genuineness rather than by her art. In this, particularly in finish and in smoothness, she was sometimes deficient. Nevertheless, were there a poetic sentiment to inspire her, she could realize a situation with great effect. This was particularly the case in the late Mr. White's play entitled "Feudal Times," produced at Sadler's Wells in 1847. In October, 1848, she migrated to the Haymarket, appearing with Mr. Creswick in "Romeo and Juliet," "The Patrician's Daughter," and other parts in which she had established her reputation.

On one or two occasions, not long after her *début*, I had the pleasure of seeing Miss Laura Addison in private. I have seldom met any one more free from the desire of personal display. Her pleasure seemed to be to listen, rather than to speak. The conversation naturally turned a good deal on the drama and acting. Sometimes a view was stated that won her sympathy, and it was pleasant to find from the few words she

would say, in a low, intense voice, how hearty that sympathy was, or how a quotation from Shakspeare or some other favourite poet would kindle that look of quiet enthusiasm which we had remarked in her acting. She seemed to us a person delightfully sincere, charming even in her reticence.

On meeting her at the Haymarket a year or two later, I was sorry to find her in impaired health. Her face showed traces of suffering, and her acting, still retaining much of its former pathos and poetry, was become, at times, spasmodic and fitful. She eventually left England for America, where she died in 1852, in her twenty-sixth year, during a voyage from Albany to New York.

In the autumn of 1849 appeared at this theatre Miss Fitzpatrick, in whose acting humour and lively characterization were combined with rare good taste and refinement. She played with great success as Letitia Hardy in "The Belle's Stratagem," as Constance in "The Love Chase," as Miss Harcastle in Goldsmith's comedy. Her union of spirit with elegance was delightful, and seemed to qualify her for a West End theatre. To the best of my recollection she remained no very long time at Sadler's Wells, where her retirement occasioned a serious loss. On quitting that house, she appeared for a season at Drury Lane. No further particulars of her career are known to the writer, who has often felt surprise that such an actress should not have been more widely known.

A very important member of Mr. Phelps's company was Mr. George Bennett. Some years before joining it he had appeared at Covent



Garden in one or two leading tragic characters, but had at length subsided into secondary parts, such as Banquo or Macduff. He was, however, a valuable actor, always earnest and intelligent, also a good elocutionist, gifted with a full, deep voice. His complexion was dark, his eyes brilliant, and capable of expressing suppressed passion in a way truly ominous, as in the revengeful Venetian in "Gisippus." He was, on the whole, most at home in characters swayed by glowing excitement or deep disappointment. These were peculiarly fitted to the expressive melancholy, even to gloom, which was so habitual with him, that he could hardly exchange it in his livelier assumptions. I never saw him play Zanga in "The Revenge," but fancy it would have suited him admirably. He was sometimes capital in those individualities which are peculiarly styled "character" parts—the hectoring Bessus in "A King or No King," for instance. In this part he has been accused of extravagance. Bessus himself, however, is a true conception pushed to extravagance. To play either Bessus or Bobadil with tame correctness, would be to deprive them of their *raison d'être*. George Bennett's Bosola in "The Duchess of Malfi," was one of his most impressive characters. In the appalling scene with the Duchess, where, as an old man, he prepares her for her approaching murder, there was something in his servile appearance, in his deep, sepulchral tones, slow movements, and watchful, deliberate revelation of the coming horror, that seemed as if he himself had had such near commerce with Death as to be the fit representative of his terrors to the living. His Caliban was surprisingly fine.

A nature akin to the brute's by its deformity, with the spite engendered by a witch-mother, rose at times into a sort of dim human perception, and then relapsed into the mere life of animal instinct, of animal fear, desire, and hatred. These alternating states were shown with admirable force and consistency. Caliban was George Bennett's highest achievement, one which would have done credit to Phelps himself. Mr. Bennett's death took place at the age of seventy-nine, in the year 1879.

Miss Fanny Cooper, the wife of Mr. Thomas Hailes Lacy, comedian, and, later, theatrical bookseller in the Strand, must have mention in speaking of Sadler's Wells. She had previously appeared at the Haymarket under Webster, and at Covent Garden under the Mathewses. At these theatres, Lydia in the "Love Chase," Aspatia in "The Bridal" (adapted from "The Maid's Tragedy"), and Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," were her best personations. At Sadler's Wells she performed those parts of which Desdemona is the type. She was an actress of much feeling and of skilled elocution. Her fault was that her simplicity had a tendency to the lackadaisical, and her sweetness to be cloying. In pathos, she was sometimes over-piteous, while her delivery was so interrupted that she seemed to bleat. Aspatia, just referred to, was her best character. The position of the grave, faithful, and deserted maiden gave some justification for ultra-sentimental treatment, and allowed Miss Cooper to display the good taste and gentleness which she brought to most of her assumptions. She died at the age of fifty-three, in 1872.

The last important name on our list in con-

nection with Mr. Phelps's company must be that of Miss Richardson, an actress of the sterner tragic heroines, who represented them with stereotyped force and propriety. Mr. Ray, however, should be mentioned as one of those few actors gifted with quaint humour, who yet avoid extravagance; also of Mr. Lewis Ball, the good results of whose early training have lately been evinced by his performance of Sir Peter Teazle at the Strand Theatre. Other actors, both comic and tragic, at "The Wells" occur to the writer. but their performances, while meritorious, and entitling them to respect, hardly require examination in detail.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## MISS CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN.

Miss Cushman may almost be regarded as an English actress—Her *debut* in “Fazio” at the Princess’s—Her personal appearance—Her acting in Bianca—The writer makes her acquaintance and visits her—Mrs. Cushman—Charlotte Cushman at home—Recommended by Forrest, the American tragedian, to try her fortune in London—Her archness, frankness, and cordiality—Her acting in Lady Macbeth—Her conscientiousness and good feeling—Illustrative anecdote—Her Rosalind, Beatrice, and Viola—Her Romeo—She requests the author to write a play for her—Desires to act a female Richelieu—Her Meg Merrilies—Discontented with her great success in this part—She plays Julia in “The Hunchback,” Duchess Eleanor in Mr. H. F. Chorley’s play of that name, and the heroine of “The Actress of Padua,” a version of Victor Hugo’s “Angelo”—Her Queen Katharine—Miss Cushman and the late Lord Lytton—A message from him—Rumoured adaptation for the stage of his novel of “Lucretia”—Her entertaining qualities in private—I meet her for the last time at Hastings—Her admiration of Salvini—Her minute and accurate description of his acting in “Othello”—Her painful illness and fortitude under it—Summary—A disciple of Swedenborg—Her death.

IN addition to the fact that we and the Americans have a common language, so large and eventful a portion of Charlotte Cushman’s career was passed in England, that I cannot but think her fully entitled to a place in my recollections of English performers. It was here that her reputation culminated, if, indeed, it was not made

here. Her initial success in Bianca at the Princess's Theatre, and the sensation caused by her later performances of Romeo, Meg Merrilies, and other characters at the Haymarket, formed the hall-mark of her reputation. She came from America an actress of promise; she returned there one of the leading actresses of her time. Those who, like the writer, were at the Princess's Theatre on the night when she made her *début* in the tragedy of "Fazio," probably felt at first that an actress of a somewhat round and capacious face, of a somewhat masculine figure, and of a grave voice, had not, spite of brilliant and expressive eyes, been liberally endowed for the stage. She had scarcely opened her lips, however, than one high mental qualification—intensity—became obvious. Entirely absorbed in her part, to all seeming utterly unconscious of the audience, there was something in her concentration and self-absorption which suggested a strange religious parallel, and made one think of her as the *dévôte* of the stage. The outburst when her jealousy of Fazio had at length been aroused, was the electric explosion of which the deep and ominous quiet before it had given warning. As a display of the passion of jealousy writhing under the torture of betrayal, breaking down the reserve of pride, and hurrying madly to revenge, Charlotte Cushman's Bianca, at the moment when she quitted the stage in the second act, will never fade from my memory. From this point to that when the doom of the husband she has adored and betrayed arrests and petrifies her, till horror subsides in death, her performance carried away the spectators by a torrent of emotion. The part of Bianca offers few chances of relief; but of

these, and the *nuances* and contrasts which a more experienced artist might have introduced, Miss Cushman neglected to avail herself. Her triumph was merely the exhibition of passion so intense and impetuous that one forgot its monotony.

Shortly after her appearance at the Princess's I became personally acquainted with her. I remember soon afterwards that my wife and myself made our way to a small house at Paddington, occupied by her mother and herself, of which I now forget the address. The house was situated in fields partly built upon, and is since become, likely enough, a unit in a populous street. Mrs. Cushman, who was a homely, genial example of the American woman, at once confided to us her plans and perplexities with respect to household affairs, complaining, amongst other things, that she could not bring her weekly expenses to less than two (or three) pounds *and a half*. I have since heard her curious application to money of a phrase generally used respecting weight repeated by others, but it was at that time so fresh and so often on Mrs. Cushman's lips that it gave a special character to her talk. Both she and Miss Cushman welcomed us with frank cordiality. The daughter, smiling, said, early in our talk, that I had been indirectly the means of bringing her to England. It appears that, young as she was, her grave and powerful style had led to her being cast for the part of the subtle and unscrupulous Lady Lydia in "The Patrician's Daughter," and that Forrest, after seeing her performance, assured her that if she could get a hearing in London, her success would be decisive. These words, she said, never suffered her to rest until she could prove the

truth of the prediction; so to London she came. Having said how glad I was to be connected, even remotely, with a visit which had given so much pleasure to my fellow-countrymen, she laughed with arch gaiety at what she called this preliminary exchange of compliments. Her candour and heartiness were not to be resisted. The brief half-hour we spent with her had converted—at least, on our parts—acquaintanceship into attachment.

Amongst the important characters in which I next saw her, at the Princess's, in 1845, was Lady Macbeth, which she rendered with her characteristic keenness of insight and sympathetic earnestness. Her performance, it must be admitted, was powerful and greatly applauded. But inasmuch as in the guilty Queen we need the gradual and varied development of character and passion, Miss Cushman's unrelieved, level earnestness of manner (which, in the repeated crises of Bianca, she had exchanged for sudden, vehement emotion) gave her Lady Macbeth a sameness of gloom which fatigued admiration. She wanted those "quick, careless strokes," of which Cibber speaks with such delight. Her acting had the effect of one of those scenes in which land and water lie beneath a dense sky. You hear the hoarse breaking of the tide, but are not roused from the pervading gloom by the sudden flash and peal of the storm. There was little of the startling intensity which she had shown in the jealous love and in the remorse of Bianca. But I did not see Charlotte Cushman's Lady Macbeth at a late period of her career, and it is quite possible that so intellectual an actress had before then seen the necessity of introducing



that relief of which tragic character admits, even when strong contrasts are impossible.

Shortly after making her acquaintance, my wife and myself had the pleasure of receiving Miss Cushman at our house. So engaging were the candour and kindly humour of her disposition, that by this time we were come to look upon her as an intimate friend. On the evening in question she gave us a striking proof of her sincerity and goodness of heart. Amongst our guests was a man of great erudition and worth, who had written one or two creditable dramas in verse, whom we all liked and respected, in spite of a delusion on his part that nature had intended him for a great actor and declaimer. This infatuation was the more to be deplored, because his voice had neither flexibility nor compass, and, when strained, emitted a shrill dissonance which taxed the listener's command of his features to the utmost. It might have been hoped that, in the presence of an actress who had recently carried away the town, our friend's propensity to elocutionary displays would have been for the time controlled; but so far was this from being the case, that he at length suggested to Miss Cushman the performance of a Shaksperian scene. I really believe it was one of the scenes between Macbeth and his Lady. For Miss Cushman's civil, but decided refusal of this proposal, he offered to compensate our guests by a recitation of the great scene in the third act of Othello, between the Moor and Iago. Having met him previously, Miss Cushman was become aware of his hobby, and of the ridicule to which his indulgence of it exposed him. She appealed to me in earnest whispers: "You're a

friend of poor B——'s; we all like and respect him; don't allow him to make himself absurd." She then addressed the same entreaty to my wife. But what was to be done? Some of the company, from politeness, others, possibly, for the fun of seeing Shakspeare burlesqued, were encouraging B—— to fulfil his threat, and seating themselves to witness the exhibition. To save B—— from being laughed at by a remonstrance which would hurt his feelings in advance, was a sacrifice to friendship of which neither host nor hostess was capable. Charlotte Cushman was equal to the emergency. "Mr. B——," she said, walking up to him, "you may think me uncivil for interfering, but please remember that acting is the work of my life, and that I seek the society of my friends for a little change. Please don't set the example of recitations." Some one then proposed that the intended recitation should be the only one of the night—a compromise to which B—— listened favourably. "Oh, it's a shame!" cried Charlotte Cushman excitedly, as she looked round, and saw on certain faces the scarcely suppressed smile of anticipation. "Mr. B——, I tell you the truth. You can appreciate dramatic poetry, and you can even write it, but you cannot declaim it. Nature has not fitted you for it. Do sit down, then; don't give your friends, who so much admire you, the pain of seeing you attempt what you cannot perform." The popular actress, as it happened, knew the majority of those present; otherwise, even she might scarcely have ventured on this honest remonstrance. B—— now retired with good grace from an embarrassing position, expressing himself good-humouredly to the effect that Miss Cushman's success had

produced an actual mania, that he had been one of its victims, and that now the cause of his infatuation had cured it. His "mania," however, whatever he may have thought, existed before she came to England.

Soon after her appearance in *Lady Macbeth*, Miss Cushman essayed the part of *Rosalind*. Her hearty enjoyment of the frolicsome and adventurous scenes, the downrightness of her manner in some of the humorous repartees, and the true tenderness which she revealed in a few passages, gained for her, in spite of too masculine a style, fair success. For an ideal *Rosalind*, however, she wanted not only personal qualifications, but that harmony and elevation of conception which *Helen Faucit* exhibited in this heroine, and which made her sportiveness seem the natural overflow of her kindly vitality. In *Beatrice* in "*Much Ado About Nothing*," and in *Viola* in "*Twelfth Night*," Miss Cushman showed the same qualifications for the heroines of comedy and the same defects as in her *Rosalind*. There was something not unpleasantly saucy in her fun, but the effect it produced was gained a little at the expense of distinction in parts where distinction was an essential.

On her engagement at the Haymarket Theatre, in 1846, London playgoers were startled by the announcement that she was about to play *Romeo* to the *Juliet* of her sister, *Susan Cushman*. Of the latter lady, I may take the opportunity of saying that her manners in private were amiable and engaging, that her chief stage-recommendations were her incontestable beauty, a fair amount of intelligence, and a composed and evenly-balanced delivery which, though it carried

her over many difficulties, was hardly appropriate to Juliet. Doubtless she would never have been chosen to play the character but for the interest of her sister, to the earnestness and energy of whose acting her own seemed a direct contrast. Of Charlotte Cushman's Romeo, it may at once be said that it was a signal triumph. It gave full scope to her impetuosity in emotion and to the virile force of her style. As a lover, the ardour of her devotion exceeded that of any male actor I have ever seen in the part. The sudden coruscation of her wrath in the fatal encounter with Tybalt equalled that of Charles Kean in a passage which had always been ranked amongst the most telling of his Shaksperian displays. In the scene with the Friar, after Romeo's doom of banishment, Miss Cushman surpassed both Charles Kean and every performer I have witnessed. So high ran her frenzy of grief, so real was the air of a "mind distraught" with which she repelled the Friar's counsel and reasoning, that when, with unexampled desperation, she dashed herself upon the earth—

"Taking the measure of an unmade grave,"

all that is extravagant and unreasonable in Romeo's behaviour was forgotten in the ardour of his love, and the house was roused to the wildest excitement, as if by some tragic event in actual life. There was a pause before the recollection that Romeo's misery was but feigned, enabled it to thank the impassioned performer in volley after volley of applause.

During Miss Cushman's engagement at the Haymarket, in 1846, I happened to superintend the preparation of a drama of my own. She

came to me on the stage at the close of rehearsal, and said as soon as we were alone together, "I should like a word with you on business. I want you to write me a drama, and I can tell you at once the sort of character I should like—in fine, I long to play a woman of strong ambition, who is at the same time very wily and diplomatic, and who has an opportunity of a great outburst when her plans are successful—in short, a female Richelieu." The account to which she would turn the outburst was obvious; the chances of success in manœuvring and *finesse* of manner were not so clear. "Captain Charlotte," I answered, addressing her by a designation which her enterprise and straightforwardness had caused some of us to give her in intimate talk, "are not your qualities rather those of passion than of diplomacy? You can fight, perhaps, better than you can manœuvre." "A great soldier," she replied, "must be a diplomatist too. I feel I could act the dissembler splendidly." "It would indeed be a triumph of art," was the rejoinder, "for one of the sincerest women alive to show herself a successful hypocrite." "You know what I want," she said. "Think of it."

Miss Cushman, like other fine artistes, may have had good grounds for feeling that she could succeed in a character with which she had no personal sympathy. However, from causes which I cannot recollect, the proposal made to me was not carried into effect.

Amongst the most popular of her embodiments was Meg Merrilies. She had, of course, derived her conception from a study of the great novelist himself, and had thus, so far as she

could, expanded and raised a sketch of the dramatic version to something like the fulness of Scott's creation in "Guy Mannering." With her commanding figure, clad in the fluttering and picturesque garb of the Scottish gipsy, with the coils of her hair escaping, if I remember, from the folds of her kerchief twisted turban-wise, she presented to the eye one of those figures which suggest the wild and the supernatural. Like Scott himself, she had made out of the forlorn woman—with her fealty to the house of Ellangowan, her passionate, almost maternal love for its heir, her fixed resolution to restore him, her weird insight into the future, including her own fate—a union of the terrible, the pathetic, and the mysterious which was truly tragic. Very affecting was the melancholy tenderness with which she recalled to Harry Bertram the days of his childhood, while the prediction that in her old haunts, to which she had been won back by love of her charge, she would be seen long after her "crazed banes were under the mould," was delivered with an air of conviction that made the listener credit its fulfilment. Probably because the incidents of "Guy Mannering," as compressed and hurried together for the purpose of the stage, took a form purely melodramatic, she habitually undervalued her performance of Meg. "Yes," she said one day, a little bitterly, "with an outlandish dress and a trick or two, I can bring much more money to the theatre than when I give the public my heart's blood in my finest characters." I saw her in many parts, but it was in those already named that she chiefly impressed the English public. Her Julia in "The Hunchback" displayed intense feeling,

but the emotion wanted relief. She appeared also at the Haymarket, without much success, as Duchess Eleanour, in a play of that name by the late Mr. A. F. Chorley. She was seen also at the Haymarket to much better effect in "The Actress of Padua" (a version of Victor Hugo's "Angelo"). Into the heroine of this play she threw much of the impetuosity and fire of her Bianca; but except when, as in the latter character, the crises of passion gave her a chance of sweeping her hearers along with her throughout, her want of variety told against her. Moreover, her plain face was a grave disadvantage to her in the young heroines of the stage. A word or two must be given to her Queen Katharine—a performance remarkable for its elaborate finish, and for the emphatic, if too uniform delivery of the dialogue. But towards the close the actress insisted too much upon the signs of bodily illness, and thus sacrificed to a great extent the higher exhibition of the Queen's mental state.

A report once prevailed that she was to appear in a drama founded on Lord Lytton's novel of "Lucretia." The idea tempted her, but for some time she remained undecided. I have said that she longed to play a diplomatist; but she was hardly sufficiently diplomatic, I think, to respond as eagerly as she might have done to the advances of the popular novelist and dramatist. The proposal touching "Lucretia" was, I believe, still pending when Lord Lytton (then Sir E. B. Lytton) chanced to hear that I was expecting her at my house. He asked me, in a tone of playful reproach which probably veiled real surprise, to remind her that she had failed to



answer one of the warmest letters of admiration he had ever written to an actress. By the advice of some of her friends, she gave up her design of adding the *female* poisoner to her list of characters.

In private, her obliging and genial nature made her the life of the company. She would sometimes sing one of the songs in vogue at the time, into the humour of which she entered with an *abandon* which, in a *grande tragédienne*, was perplexing to those who did not understand how closely humour and pathos are allied in sympathetic minds. My last meeting with her was at Hastings, whither she came to spend the afternoon from some not distant village of the coast where she was then staying. She was thoroughly herself that afternoon in her charming alternations of gaiety and enthusiasm. I remember her speaking in glowing terms of Salvini, whom she had seen in Italy, and who was then known in England by repute only. She described his acting in *Othello* with a minuteness and a fervour of appreciation which made me feel some years afterwards, when I saw that great actor in the same part, that I was realizing, scene after scene, details of his power of which I had already had a foretaste. So generous, so infectious was her love of what is beautiful and great in art, and so felicitous her expression, that I wished she had been a public critic as well as an actress.

I remember our party walking with her to the railway station, and then watching the receding train, with no foreboding that it bore her for ever from our view. With what brave resolution she combated, and for a time overcame the cruel disease which at last proved fatal to her

is generally known by those interested in the stage.

With her the expression of passion was spontaneous and overmastering. She could present those startling revelations which have their birth in the ardour of sympathy, and to which mere skill and study never attain. Her Bianca, her Meg Merrilies, her Romeo, will not be forgotten in the life-times of her auditors. In early life she embraced the tenets of Emanuel Swedenborg, her single-minded and sympathetic nature responding to a theology which made religion consist in belief in and love of the Supreme, and in worship of Him by love to one's neighbour and practical goodness. To this creed I believe she adhered until the end. Many in England still mourn her both for her genius and her worth. By her death, which took place in Boston, U.S., at the age of sixty, in 1876, America lost her greatest actress.

## CHAPTER XIV.

MR. JOHN B. BUCKSTONE, MR. ROBERT KEELEY, AND  
MR. HENRY COMPTON.

Boyish recollections of Buckstone and Keeley—Buckstone's trombone-playing symbolical of his acting—First impressions of Keeley—His humour a complete contrast to Buckstone's—The latter's drollery effective but extravagant—His Sir Andrew Ague-check—His Sir Benjamin Backbite—Buckstone in every part—The public wished no better—His facial expression, voice, and manner described—His Bob Acres, Tony Lumpkin, etc.—Appears in various plays of the writer—Accused of questionable taste—His management of the Haymarket, in 1853—Number of dramatic authors engaged during his management—His own dramas and farces—Tempted to alter and interpolate matter in the plays of others—Example of this in Mrs. Crowe's "Cruel Kindness," produced at the Haymarket—The authoress highly offended—Her loud displeasure overheard by Buckstone, who was probably about to enter her box, but altered his mind—His views as to a dramatist's remuneration—His own experience as a dramatist in that respect—His speeches at Theatrical Fund dinners on the occasions of his annual benefit—Much of their success owing to his delivery—Genial and sympathetic off the stage—Illustrations of this—His Dramatic Club at the Haymarket—Writer's visit thereto—A reception at the theatre—He personates a baker's man—His contributions to social mirth at the writer's house—Gradual increase of his infirmities—His death—No present actor quite fills his place. KEELEY—His humour the *vis inertix* of comedy—His acting described—His Peter Spyk at the Olympic—His Verges—His Peter in "Romeo and Juliet"—His Diego in "The Spanish Curate"—His Dolly Spanker—To a great extent always Keeley—His expression and personal appearance—Variety of his theatrical predicaments—His

acting in "The Prisoner of War," in "A Thumping Legacy," in "Mind Your Own Business," and in "Two Loves and a Life"—In 1844 enters with Mrs. Keeley upon management of the Lyceum—In 1847 the Keeleys join Webster at the Haymarket—Keeley has a novel character in "Dearest Elizabeth"—"Keeley Worried by Buckstone"—Contrast between the two comedians—Enters with Kean upon the management of the Princess's—Plays a jilted suitor with admirable moderation—This quality not always serviceable—Sir Hugh Evans—A run with him across the Channel—His manner in private—Hearty reception given to him after his retirement at a public dinner to Webster—His death. COMPTON—Not an actor of great variety of manner, though he could at times throw pathos and refinement into his humour—His humour dry, and sometimes a little forced; but his conception just and suggestive, and his effects well designed—Characters in which he excelled—His stolidity resembled Liston's—Different shades of this quality in Liston, Keeley, and Compton—Compton's Shaksperian characters—Touchstone, Dogberry, Verges, Cloten, First Gravedigger in "Hamlet," William in "As You Like It"—Compton as Dr. Pangloss, Dominic Sampson, etc.—His acting in foregoing characters described—Contrast between his Dr. Pangloss and that of Mr. John S. Clarke—His Modus in "The Hunchback"—His De Vaudray in "A Hero of Romance"—Objects to proposed alterations in his part—Summary of his qualities as an actor—Personal traits of him—His appearance—General esteem for him—His death.

I HAVE a boyish recollection, vague, yet tenacious, of the first times that I saw Mr. Buckstone and Mr. Keeley. I forget the names of the pieces in which they severally appeared, and keep but the faintest impression of their plots. Mr. Buckstone I saw at the Adelphi, blowing a trombone with inflated cheeks, evidently to his own delight, and much to the annoyance of his companions on the stage. That night stands out to me as a night of hearty enjoyment chiefly due to Buckstone, though his comical air as the too-persistent trombone-player is the only distinct feature that remains to me

of his performance. Keeley first gave me a taste of his humour at the Olympic, then under Madame Vestris. She herself played in the burletta—I think, “Beulah Spa”—in which he performed the character of a young man, whose mother (probably Mrs. Macnamara or Mrs. Orger), from a desire to prevent the natural inferences as to her own age, insisted on dressing him and treating him as a boy. Most humorous was Keeley’s quiet toleration of this absurdity, till, raising his hand in its jacket-sleeve to his chin, he drew attention to a stubby growth that seemed imperatively to demand the razor. This was done in a way so matter-of-fact, so free from all consciousness of the ridiculous, that extremes met, and the restraint of effort produced as much mirth as effort itself could have done.

In these two reminiscences there seems to be a type of the distinction between the actors. Buckstone, in all his characters, was metaphorically the trombone-player, calling attention to his humour by salient and very effective appeals to his audience, demonstrative, various, gesticulatory. Keeley, on the contrary, was usually phlegmatic, impassive, and pathetically acquiescent in the droll inflictions which fate had in store for him. To carry drollery to its furthest point seemed the height of Buckstone’s ambition. It would be untrue to say he cared little for the exhibition of character. His genial people were ultra-genial, his cowards thorough poltroons, his mischief-makers revelled in their sport; but it is quite true to say that characterization with him was quite subordinate to mirth. The brainless, conceited, cowardly Sir Andrew Ague-cheek, with his efforts at wit and his repugnance

to cold steel, is, even when acted with moderation, a very laughable person; but with Buckstone's smirking self-complacency, with his variety of grimace and contortion, a height of absurdity was reached which delighted the public, if not always the critic. To see him, again, in Sir Benjamin Backbite, in the "School for Scandal," was a rare treat for those who were not nice as to the boundary-line between comedy and farce. How absurd was his affectation of modesty; with what zest did he convey his insinuations against character, and then play aside the part of hilarious chorus to the effect he had produced! It is true that, in almost every part, he was Buckstone; it is equally so that the public did not wish him to be any one else. There were good reasons for this. Never was there a face more fitted to excite mirth—there being an expression of astuteness and self-restraint in the upper part of the face, while the lips, and the lines from the somewhat expansive nose downwards, seemed on the alert for a grin, giving a union of shrewdness and drollery, with their interaction upon each other, that was irresistibly comic. Add to these a voice that now doled out in tones (at times nasal) of humorous languor, as if enjoying by anticipation the fun it was about to produce, and then surprised you by a loud, triumphant burst as the point was made. He knew he was the pet of his audience, and never lost his chance of taking it into his confidence by a sort of advertising look, which seemed to say, "Attention! Something droll is about to happen."

Amongst Buckstone's foremost parts were Scrub in "The Beaux' Stratagem," Bob Acres,

and Tony Lumpkin. Out of numerous examples of his mirth-compelling power in modern pieces, may be cited his acting of Dove in "Married Life," of the Lawyer's Clerk in "Nicholas Flam," of Golightly in "Lend Me Five Shillings," of Bob Picket in "An Alarming Sacrifice"—all the pieces just named having proceeded from his own pen—and of his Box in the famous "Box and Cox" of Mr. Morton, and of Asa Trenchard in Mr. Tom Taylor's "American Cousin." He was the efficient Shadowly Softhead of the late Lord Lytton's "Not so Bad as He Seems." The writer of these remarks was indebted to his acting on three several occasions for the relief of a serious interest. On the last of these he played Tom Sutherland in "The Favourite of Fortune."

From what has already been said, it will be inferred that the chief drawback from this favourite actor's striking merit was his love of exaggeration. He was accused by some critics of violating taste in certain characters by the breadth of his illustrations. This occasional fault was the result of the same animal spirits and enjoyment of frolic to which he was indebted for much of his success. When at the height of his power, there was probably no such mirth-moving name as that of Buckstone in his own day. The humour of Liston and that of Keeley, for instance, though more subtle, was hardly so generally taking. Just as the audiences of a former age refused to tolerate Sandford, the renowned actor of villains, in a virtuous part, so those of his own time refused to accept Buckstone in a serious part. The uproar of merriment which arose from his appearance as one of the witches in Macbeth is too well known to need more than an allusion.



His management of the Haymarket, which began in March, 1853, and continued until within a year or two of his death, was remarkable for the variety of works supplied by contemporary authors. These included Mrs. Catherine Crowe, Mrs. Lovell, Messrs. Planché, Burnand, Tom Taylor, Byron, W. S. Gilbert, Westland Marston, and Tom Robertson.

Of the numerous pieces written by Buckstone, many attained great success. Amongst his dramas, "Ellen Wareham," "Victorine," "The Wreck Ashore," "Flowers of the Forest," and the famous "Green Bushes," are perhaps the best remembered; amongst his farces or comediettas, "Uncle John," "The Rough Diamond," and "Nicholas Flam," the principal character in which, originally performed by Farren, gained the liking of Phelps, and was occasionally performed by him on benefit nights, in addition to the *pièce de résistance*.

As a dramatist, in the imaginative expression of feeling, Buckstone's humour, like his pathos is well-directed and very telling. The Haymarket manager was sometimes tempted to interpolate and otherwise alter the plays in which he appeared. He did so in the case of a play called "The Cruel Kindness," by Mrs. Catherine Crowe, which I introduced to him. The piece was well received, and at the fall of the curtain I went to Mrs. Crowe's box to offer my congratulations. I found, however, that it was rather my sympathetic indignation that the authoress expected. Buckstone had so greatly changed and broadened a comic part which he played himself, that, in her opinion, the congruity of the piece, which was in the main serious, was

spoiled. It was undoubtedly true that the absurdly eccentric being whom the actor had substituted for the original sketch was somewhat out of keeping with the grave character of the piece. Humour might have been a fit relief in such a piece. Here the relief was that of farce. "Did you give Mr. Buckstone no permission?" I asked. "Oh, I may have consented to his putting in a phrase now and then; but what notion could I have that he was going to rewrite his part?" Full of her wrongs, the lady protracted the talk until the curtain had risen for the after-piece. At length she rose to go, and stood with the box-door open, still venting her grievances to the friends around her. "And it's a great liberty," she said, with some heat, "for any one to rewrite my characters, and to make me responsible for his dialogue. My night has been spoiled, and I am thoroughly indignant." As she was speaking, a little plump, well-known figure paused near the box-door, then passed on. The lessee had probably come, with much satisfaction, to present himself on the success of the piece. It is not unnatural that the words which he caught—deafness had not then gained upon him—should have deterred him, and that he should have felt hurt at his interpolations (which, to say the truth, had been heartily laughed at) being resented as intrusive. I met him shortly after the production of the piece, but neither of us adverted to the incident just related.

Uniting in himself the often conflicting interests of manager and dramatic author, it was amusing to see his bias towards himself in the former capacity. I think it was when discussing terms about this very play of Mrs. Crowe's that

he reverted pathetically to his days as a young dramatist. "Ah, ah! times are much changed!" he said. "When I began to write for the stage, I never thought of asking what I was to get for a piece till I knew what I had done for the manager." I reminded him how much the value of dramatic work had since risen, and that he himself had contributed a good deal to that result.

The favourite comedian could scarcely be called eloquent; but a speech by him at a Theatrical Fund dinner, on the occasion of his annual benefit, was looked forward to as one of the chief events of the evening. His orations, though often quaint, and not deficient in humour, would on merely reading them scarcely suggest the volleys of mirth which they produced when they had the advantage of his look and intonations. Figures of arithmetic and dry statistics seemed comical when they flowed from his lips, and the announcement of a successful season, or a good balance in hand, was as exhilarating as the climax of a comedy.

Stage humorists are not seldom very grave persons in private. Buckstone had, of course, his serious moods, but he was as a rule genial and sympathetic. He enjoyed the joke of rallying an author in the event of a success, and of demanding what he meant by not leaving him a seat to give away to his friends. He would talk slyly of Sothern's passion for seeing the house crowded, and remark that the actor in question would like to keep a night's receipts out of the house by "paper," to persuade people there was money in it. Buckstone was in his element as chairman of the Theatrical Club which

he had founded at his own theatre. By great favour, the writer was introduced to the solemnities of the circle, which held its meetings in an apartment at the top of the Haymarket staircase. The lessee, still in the dress he had worn on the stage, was in the chair, and proposed the health of the new-comer with a comical assumption of dignity, and in words that implied the great favour shown to any one admitted into the circle of the august brotherhood, which could boast more than masonic mysteries and privileges. This brief address he accompanied by looks of droll appeal to the members of the club, chiefly, if not wholly composed of the actors of the theatre, who, as he was popular with them, fell into his humour, and echoed his sentiments with the most deferential loyalty. The languid pomposity of an Eastern despot in Buckstone's manner, and the obsequious homage of his courtiers, was in itself a very enjoyable bit of comedy. It is needless to say that the stranger who was for once tolerated by that august body showed himself fully sensible of the honour.

One instance of Buckstone's love of fun occurred at a reception given at the theatre in the week preceding Easter. The evening was far advanced, and talk and merriment were at their height, when a shrill cry was heard, and the figure of a baker, in a somewhat battered hat, and wearing the usual white apron, was seen advancing with a huge basket on his arm. "Buns—buns—hot-cross buns!" was his cry, as the basket was offered to the company. The baker was, of course, the comedian, who, a few minutes before, had been circulating in evening dress amongst his guests. I remember one evening at my own house, when

he was the life of the entire company, and carried the hearts of the younger fair by storm. Amongst other dances we had Sir Roger de Coverley. I am not quite certain whether he absolutely took part in it, but at all events he played chorus to it with such stimulating phases, and such sympathetic animation of look and gesture, that the good old performance reached the very climax of mirth. Alas! the years glide away and bring their results. Increasing deafness and other infirmities gradually withdrew Mr. Buckstone from the stage. He quitted it two or three seasons before his death, which took place at the age of seventy-eight, October 31, 1879. No living comedian quite fills the place which he vacated.

It has already been said that Keeley and Buckstone were striking contrasts, the latter being the soul of action in humour, enhancing its effects by all that could be done, the former being passivity itself—the *vis inertiae* of comedy, the suffering, and often resigned victim of a persecuting fate. In the display of a mind staggered by responsibilities and dangers to which it was ludicrously unequal; or, on rare occasions, evincing desperate temerity like that of a stag at bay; or possessed by a stupid, satisfied immobility, when instant action was needed; or by the infirmities of age, vacant and yielding, but with enough perception to give a fatuous gleam of intelligence,—in all these Keeley was unrivalled in his day. In these recollections, I have before mentioned my first impression of him at the Olympic, in a not very important character. At the Olympic I also saw him as Peter Spyk in “The Loan of a

Lover," a part in which he excited unbounded mirth by his slowly dawning consciousness of a love which afterwards grew to inordinate jealousy. He was capable, however, of much higher things than these. In no part, perhaps, did he shine more than in Verges in "Much Ado," which he performed both at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. With the dotage of senility, this admirable Verges showed, too, the cunning of a harmless vanity, so that although his reverence for Dogberry was plain enough on the whole, it was not until he had disguised his dulness by affecting to ponder that he gave his assent to his partner's observations. Delicious, too, was his look of self-approval and importance when he elucidated a dictum of Dogberry's by a comment, or supplemented his directions by an incongruous addition. At certain moments he seemed to have forgotten his collocutor, while his thin, far-away voice quavered as if it were wandering in search of old saws and precedents. How delightful, again, was the doggedness of his Peter in "Romeo and Juliet!" With what an air of importance and condescension did he ply the Nurse's fan, as one who moodily filled the station in life which fate had accorded him, with a strong impression, however, that he had not been used according to his merits. His air of half-suppressed mutiny when she reproaches him, and, indeed, his whole bearing towards her, was a silent comment upon her whims and vanities, and an appeal from the lot which had placed his superior intellect at her command.

I did not see his hungry sexton, Diego, on the revival of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Spanish Curate" at Covent Garden—a performance in

which, according to high critical authorities, he divided the attraction with Farren. The next year his personation of Dolly Spanker, on the production of "London Assurance," was one of the most diverting features of that comedy. His resourceless feebleness and meek pliability in the hands of his spirited, though at times indulgent wife, was an absurd picture of an infantile mind in the body of an adult. Will seemed an omitted element in his nature; it seemed as if even his bodily motions should have been impelled by others, and that he should have been pushed along in a go-cart. It is true that, to a great extent, he was always Keeley—Keeley with his quiet, effortless art, generally with an expression compounded of obtuseness, perplexity, and long-suffering; Keeley with his small stature, and that pronounced Roman nose which would have given a look of decision, if it had not been ludicrously neutralized by the immobility of his other features and the inert resignation of his expression. Notwithstanding, however, the sameness of this comedian's manner, it was not only droll in itself, but the circumstances in which it was shown were capable of being greatly varied. Whether we recall him as Peter Pall Mall in "The Prisoner of War," with his patriotic, lazy gasconading over the French, to whom he asserts the superiority of London Bordeaux to Lafitte; or as the pacific citizen in "A Thumping Legacy," who has inherited an unwelcome bequest of hereditary Corsican vengeance, and whose face reveals a dismal and stupefying terror, caused by this unlooked-for responsibility; or as the *ci-derant* footman, with his much-enduring physiognomy,



in "Mind Your Own Business," who comes into a fortune, and marries a vulgar woman with aristocratic airs, who tortures and intimidates him for his illiteracy, till, in final revolt, he reappears before his disdainful wife and her uncle in his former menial livery; or as the unhappy victim in "Two Loves and a Life," who, under threat of instant death if he betrays his terror, is commanded to walk so many paces before his possible executioners;—in all these positions we were amused at recognizing the same individuality with sufficient difference of circumstance to give novelty to its presentment.

Among the pieces just mentioned, "The Prisoner of War" and "A Thumping Legacy" were produced during Keeley's engagement at Drury Lane, under Macready, in 1841-42.

In 1844 Mr. and Mrs. Keeley entered upon the management of the Lyceum Theatre, where their rule was chiefly signalized by the dramatic versions of Dickens's Christmas stories, and by gorgeous burlesques, of which "The Forty Thieves" is a still-remembered example.

In 1847 the Keeleys joined Mr. Webster at the Haymarket. One piece, "Dearest Elizabeth," produced there the following year, though objectionably lax in its tone, must have special notice, because it provided Keeley with a novel character. It was that of a rather dissipated husband, one of whose love letters falls into the hands of a domestic (admirably played by Mrs. Keeley), whom her master is forced to conciliate by pretending the letter was meant for herself. Betsy encourages his overtures, though she is secretly married to the male servant, a confidant of the erring husband, who confides to him the

secret of his intrigue. Other complications arising, the whole piece enabled Keeley to exhibit a coolness and astuteness indescribably diverting. At this theatre he played, in "Mind Your Own Business," the part of the hen-pecked husband, formerly a footman, of whom mention has been made. "Keeley Worried by Buckstone," also produced at this house, in which the former resolves to quit the theatre because thoroughly worn out by the pranks of the latter, gave Keeley a capital opportunity of contrasting the sedate humour of his own style with the ebullient jocularity of his fellow-comedian.

In 1850 Mr. Keeley joined Charles Kean, for what proved a brief term, in the management of the Princess's Theatre. Here his most important original part was probably that of a suitor who has been formerly jilted by a certain imposing widow, who has now designs of bringing her discarded suitor back to his allegiance. Though she is finally successful, not unnaturally some misgivings arise in his mind to delay the happy result. In interpreting these the actor increased the drollery of his position by the quietude of his manner, and increased the humour of his part by the absence of exaggeration. His extreme moderation, however, was not always serviceable. In Keeley's hands, Sir Hugh Evans, for instance, in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," became tame for want of a fuller display of his humours. It is, perhaps, chiefly in parts where disasters or perplexities gather comically over the actor's head that a style so quiet as that of Keeley's tells. In such a case the rapid action of events throws out with the best effect the passive helplessness of the victim.

The list of Mr. Keeley's characters is a long one, but his place as a comedian is probably sufficiently marked by those which have been instanced. It is probable that no other caused so much mirth with so slight an effort, with scarcely any deviation, in fact, from his manner off the stage. I once crossed with him from Folkestone to Boulogne, and, in the course of a long talk, was amusingly struck by the identity of Keeley the actor with Keeley in private. Easy, conversational, and grave, there was yet so humorous a contrast between the dignity and, if I may use the word, the innocence of his expression, that it was at once conceivable how droll an effect the comedian of small stature might spontaneously produce in many of the positions already described. The circumstances of his appearance, after his retirement, at the banquet given to Mr. Webster at the Freemasons' Tavern, and of the enthusiasm of his welcome (which I remember drew from him irrepressible weeping), have already been related. He died at the age of seventy-five, in February, 1869.

Somewhat less popular than Buckstone and Keeley, but still amongst the first eccentric comedians of his time, was their contemporary, Henry Compton. His manner of acting, like that of the two actors just named, was pretty much the same in all characters, though now and then he could give to it a touch of pathos or refinement to which his brother-humorists scarcely attained. Of the three actors named, he was decidedly the most objective. His humour was not, like theirs, unctuous or spontaneous, but dry, and at times a little forced. His conception, however, was, for the most part,

just and suggestive, and his effects were so well planned that they did not much suffer from occasional hardness of execution. He excelled in characters of pragmatistical conceit, of unconscious eccentricity, sometimes combined with pathos, and of self-satisfied stolidity. This stolidity somewhat resembled Liston's, but it was dryer, and a little more pugnacious and opinionative. Liston's contentment with himself was so thorough, that he seemed to have a mild and genial indulgence for men in general. The stolidity of Compton, again, did not resemble the resigned helplessness of Keeley. With the comedian now spoken of it was constant and fixed. Words were slow, as if they would have been wasted on inferior minds, and the manner of delivering them was oracular and final.

Amongst the characters in which I best recall him, were a few from Shakspeare—Touchstone, Dogberry, also Verges, Cloten in "Cymbeline," and the First Gravedigger in "Hamlet." I remember, too, in 1842, his acting of the very brief part of William in "As You Like It," which, by his air of peasant wonder and panic, he raised into a feature of the play. In other plays, his Dr. Pangloss in "The Heir-at-Law," his Dominie Sampson in "Meg Merrilies," and a few performances in farce and burlesque, as in "Fish Out of Water," and the Haymarket burlesque of "Electra," are the first to occur to me.

His First Gravedigger in "Hamlet," short though the part is, was one of his most remarkable performances. He played it on what was virtually Charles Kean's *début* as a tragedian, in 1838. He played it to the Hamlet of Mr. Irving for more than one season at the Lyceum. The

part specially suited him. Not easily to be forgotten was his authoritative precision in laying down "crowner's-quest law" to his fellow, his grim mirth when he propounded the riddle, "Who is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?" and his air of superior indulgence in "Cudgel thy brains no more about it; for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating: and when you are asked this question next, say a grave-maker." His jests and humour, again, over Yorick's skull were truly those of a fellow to whom custom had made them "a property of easiness." Like amphibious creatures, who thrive in two elements, he could draw a relish alike from the goods of life, and send for his "stoup of liquor," or regale his listeners with churchyard bones and the savour of mortality. The comedian's "dryness" was of the greatest value in this part. Nothing that is called "unction" would have been nearly so telling or so true.

His Dogberry, dressed in a little brief authority, was quaintly dogmatic and self-satisfied; but it had a touch of superciliousness that was foreign to the part, and it lacked that benevolence which save where his vanity was wounded, made the worthy official so tender to Verges, and so willing, under one pretext or another, to let off the worst delinquents. Verges suited the actor better. He might have been more genial with advantage, but his affectation of senile sagacity, especially in endorsing the wisdom of Dogberry, was admirable. You saw it was chiefly habit—the mechanics of the brain at work after the mental impulse had ceased. The ray of intellect now and then struggling through the old man's clouded intellect was

depicted with great reality. In characters with a flavour of dictatorial impertinence, of condescension to duller wits, in laying down the law, or solving a problem, he was always happy. His Touchstone, therefore, ranks deservedly high. In the quaint aphorisms and expositions with which his part abounds, he was deliciously conceited and oracular; while his toleration of Audrey gained zest from the sense that she was the best of foils to his own wit.

His performance of Cloten, when Macready produced "Cymbeline" at Drury Lane, deserves special mention. The character is one of the most offensive which Shakspeare ever drew. He was well aware of the courtesies which gentle blood entails, and in this very play of "Cymbeline" has exemplified them by the consideration which the Roman general and Cymbeline evince for each other, notwithstanding their mutual defiance. In Cloten, however, the poet has shown that vulgarity of nature may be associated with high position, and thus we have a princely snob in a man of high descent. All the arrogance, the senseless self-will, and the unscrupulousness of the part were admirably caught by the actor; while the tone of the braggart, too obtuse to note the ridicule he excites, made the personation infinitely diverting. Compton was accused by one critic at the time of overmuch "swagger" in the part. With less, however, I doubt whether the part would have been true; it would certainly have been less humorous and less effective.

Dr. Pangloss, in "The Heir-at-Law," was one of his most successful assumptions. His stolid self-complacency; the satisfied chuckle with which he gave out his classical quotations with an

increased sense of importance ; his keen eye to his own interest ; his persuasion that absurdities in pursuit of it were dignified by his commission of them, and that no reward could equal his deserts—composed a solemn and pedantic figure, which, with a facial expression not only appropriate, but varied, caused not only genuine mirth, but pleasure arising from legitimate art.

I have since seen another performance of Dr. Pangloss—that of Mr. John S. Clarke—presenting a widely different personage from that of Compton, which, nevertheless, deserves high praise. Whereas Compton was dryly self-sufficient and measured in the part, and there was a touch of grimness in the sense of his superiority, Clarke was dexterous, seductive, and now and then wary and rapid. Sometimes he stood with an arm arrested and a knee half-advanced, as if in momentary doubt whether to go or to remain. There was often the cautious indecision, with the keen observation of a cat in his look and attitude. He had also the feline qualities of agility contrasting with occasional deliberation, and of a tartness which, though rarely displayed, showed that he could scratch. Like Compton's, his Dr. Pangloss was a fine example of legitimate comedy ; while the comparison between the two is interesting, because it shows how excellent may be two versions of a character widely distinct in point of temperament, and yet at one in fundamental egotism. Those who have only seen Mr. Clarke in *De Boots*, and other eccentric parts in which this master of drolleries convulses an audience, must witness his Dr. Pangloss to form a just idea of his capacity as an artist.

Dominie Sampson, in the piece founded on



"Guy Mannering," was one of the few pieces which gave Compton a chance of exhibiting pathos. As in the novel, so in Compton's performance, the awkwardness of the Dominie's person and bearing, his absent-mindedness, his eccentricities of speech, increased rather than detracted from the touching effect of his devotion to Harry Bertram. The perplexed abstractions and amazement which the actor could so well assume were of signal use in this character. The temptations which it offered to extravagance were admirably resisted, and though the eccentricities of the faithful dependant were vividly conveyed, they sprang from his individualities, and in no case belonged to the antics of the *farceur*. The Dominie was a real being, and the revelation of his love for his pupil had the agreeable surprise which the disclosure of fine feelings beneath an uncouth exterior always produces. "There is a soul of goodness in things evil." Compton showed in this performance that there is a soul of pathos in things absurd.

I once saw him in Modus in "The Hunchback." He filled in this exaggerated sketch excellently. He wanted youth for it, not only in appearance, but in the style of his acting, which was generally unimpulsive and methodical. Here again, however, his quietude and freedom from extravagance gave his personation all the reality of which it admitted, while his expression and manner revealed in countless ways the shy and abstracted student. Not only in relation to the provoking Cousin Helen, but to the characters in general, he wore a timid and retiring manner, which seemed to confess that his presence in a world of action was an intrusion to be apologized

for. His air of stupefaction when Helen first hints at love, his dim conception afterwards that it might be felt even for him, and his quick retreat from this too daring notion, were given with delightful *finesse*; while the air of mingled enjoyment and shy trepidation with which he allowed the forward girl to adjust the ruff round his neck was as humorous a display of opposing feelings as could well be imagined. When Helen feared that he should think her bold in "trusting her face so near to his," his depressing modesty took her words literally, and the look full of disappointment and quickly stifled hope with which he answered, "I know not what you mean," could not have been bettered. Nor did this fine artist fall into the excess of contrast to which some actors of *Modus* are prone. The shy lover when he is wooed retained much of his shyness when he grew bold enough to woo, so that it was rather with nervous misgiving than with the air of pleased assurance we have sometimes witnessed that he began the scene in the fourth act, gradually gaining courage until his tormentor gave way. In my experience, *Modus* was never acted with so much moderation, and at the same time with so much effect.

As De Vaudray in "A Hero of Romance," he made almost a new departure. He performed the part of a modern dandy not only with superior and good-humoured *nonchalance*, but with a pleased utterance of commonplaces, as if they were golden aphorisms, which caused unbounded mirth. Thus, his remark in speaking of an intractable horse, "If you once succeed in getting across his back, and if you are then fortunate

enough to maintain your position there—why, of course, it's a great point in your favour," awoke some of the heartiest laughter ever heard in the Haymarket.

It must be owned that this valuable comedian was sometimes unfortunate in being cast for new parts that gave no great scope to his ability. To this cause, perhaps, was due his disappointed and restless look at the reading of plays—that is, if I may infer this to have been his ordinary manner from my few meetings with him on these occasions. Buckstone could not persuade him to play the part of Fox Bromley in "The Favourite of Fortune," which Mr. Chippendale ultimately played with much success, and which, during the trial trip of the piece, Mr. Henry Irving, then comparatively unknown to fame, raised into a feature at Liverpool. With the effect of De Vaudray, doubtless largely due to his peculiar humour, Compton, however, seemed agreeably surprised. For the sake of introducing new scenes into this piece after its production, it was thought desirable to strike out some of the existing dialogue. Sothern and Buckstone had concurred in this arrangement, at the cost of losing a few points. Amongst the passages in which Compton took part was one which, not being very closely connected with the plot, appeared suitable for omission. But it chanced that he attached particular value to his place in the dialogue. On hearing the suggestion of a cut he assumed one of those looks of wondering incredulity which were so effective on the stage. "You can't be seriously thinking of taking away my laugh at that point," he said. "I couldn't possibly afford it." The same night, in the

front of the house, I once more heard the effect which he produced, and felt that it would be unjust to the artist to urge the matter further.

What has before been casually stated or implied may here be repeated. Mr. Compton was not eminently an impulsive actor. He was very rarely sparkling, or carried away; he did not, like Buckstone, heighten the effect of his humour by his own enjoyment of it, but, as extremes meet, by dry unconsciousness. His method was calculated and deliberate, but with so just an aim that it ensured its mark; while it was aided by an intonation so quaint, and by facial expression so varied and subtle, that made it no less entertaining than just. If in all his characters certain peculiarities of voice and manner asserted themselves, the characters themselves were yet well discriminated. A partial tendency to sameness of execution, in a word, did not with him prevent variety of conception. His freedom from extravagance was noteworthy, his effects of look and gesture taking rise, like leaves from a root, from the individuality of his part, not being imposed upon it from without, like gaudy and needless flowers already gathered. Though the parts in which he mostly appeared were of a broad type, he showed human nature beneath them, and proved himself a legitimate artist in eccentric comedy. He was a conscientious, intellectual, and sterling actor, who has yet to find a fit successor.

My private knowledge of Mr. Compton was derived only from a few pleasant chats at rehearsal, or during a "wait" now and then at a night's performance. Genial, full of character

and shrewdness, he was an agreeable and interesting companion. His zeal for the dignity of his profession was remarkable. One night, while discussing the appearance in an important part of a new actress, whose claims to that distinction could scarcely be traced to her talent, he expressed his indignation with satirical warmth; while, on the other hand, I found his estimate very generous of those who, by conduct and ability, had done honour to their profession. Comely in person, with an ample and well-moulded brow, a Roman nose, an expressive eye, and a plastic mouth, thickly clustering hair, and a somewhat tall and slender figure, Mr. Compton possessed many external advantages. Much regretted, and after receiving many tokens of public and private esteem, he died at the age of seventy-two, in September, 1877.

## CHAPTER XV.

## MR. SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

His acting—His popularity with audiences, spite of grave faults—His lectures and recitations—"The Burial of Sir John Moore"—Knowles as a dramatist—His adaptation from Beaumont and Fletcher, called "The Bridal"—Knowles's *Virginius*—After-dinner talk on his plays—"The Hunchback"—"The Love Chase"—"The Daughter"—"William Tell"—Serious tone in Knowles's dramas—His religious impressions—Joins the denomination of Baptists—His preaching—Selects from the Bible for reading before sermon passages capable of dramatic effect—His letters to the author on the subject of religion—The Calvinism which he had imbibed foreign to his genial nature—Occasional outbreaks of the latter—His social disposition and heartiness—An illustrative anecdote—Knowles and the enthusiastic tailor—His taste in poetry—Discussion with him on Mrs. Browning's poetry—His death, in 1862.

I HAVE seen my old friend Sheridan Knowles on the stage only on one or two occasions. There was much fervour and sincerity in his acting, which, however, did not greatly impress me. His emotion seemed to be always at boiling-point. Through a want of relief and transition, his style soon became tedious. Excitement at times interfered with the clearness of his utterance, which did not gain in charm by the addition of a strong Irish brogue. His unmistakable earnestness, however, recommended him to audiences with whom, moreover, he was highly popular

on account of his success as a dramatist. They evidently felt, both in his plays and in his acting, that "his heart was in the right place." Occasionally he gave lectures on elocution, with illustrative recitations. I liked him better on the platform than on the stage. On the latter he was comparatively calm, and there his delivery had more discrimination and variety. One of his favourite selections was "The Burial of Sir John Moore," which he declaimed with great solemnity and dramatic point, making a great effect of the shocked feeling and the patriotic consolation in the lines—

"We thought, as we hollowed his narrow bed,  
And smoothed down his lonely pillow,  
That the foe and the stranger would tread o'er his head,  
And we far away on the billow !

"Oh, lightly they'll talk of the spirit that's gone,  
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him ;  
But little he'll reck, if they let him sleep on  
*In the grave where A BRITON has laid him."*

The last line, delivered in the way I have tried to indicate by italics and capitals, still roused a national feeling thirty or forty years back. There was, perhaps, some cant in the enthusiasm ; but cynicism, likewise, has a cant of its own. Perhaps, on the whole, traditional, outworn ideals are better than none.

As a dramatist, Knowles, in my poor opinion (and until very lately that opinion has not been challenged), has very high claims. In point of the imagination which springs from the sense of beauty, he was not equal to some of the Elizabethan men who, in respect of style, had so much influenced him. He could not have written the ominous and terror-striking scenes



of Webster in "The Duchess of Malfi," and his hearty and vigorous scenes in "The Bridal" (an adaptation from Beaumont and Fletcher's "Maid's Tragedy") show how inferior he was to his masters in expression at once passionate and poetical. But imagination is more often born of feeling than is generally believed, and faculty of this kind must not be denied to the poet who wrote, when Virginius calls his dead child, and fancies she answers—

"Virginia!

Is it a voice or nothing answers me?

I hear a sound so fine, there's nothing lives

'Twixt it and silence."

And in the same tragedy, when Lucius comes to tell Virginius at the camp of Virginia's seizure, and hesitates to speak—

*Luc.* Stay,  
Virginius, hear me then with patience.

*Virg.* Well,  
I am patient.

*Luc.* Your Virginia——

*Virg.* Stop, my Lucius.

I'm cold in every member of my frame.

If 'tis prophetic, Lucius, of thy news,

Give me such tokens as her tomb could; Lucius,

I'd bear it better. Silence.

*Luc.* You are still——

*Virg.* I thank thee, Jupiter, I am still a father."

The dramatic climax reached in this passage is as full of the heart's imagination as are the words full of figurative and touching beauty which precede it. Whoever has heard Macready's interruption of convulsive joy in the last line, will hardly look for any more supreme example of manly pathos. The last act of "Virginius" is far from being strong. Yet in its melancholy

calm, though lit up suddenly by the wild justice of vengeance, there is a satisfying fitness. The fury of the storm subsides, and, but for one fatal return, dies away in plaintive sweetness. The burst of insane passion, at the end of which Virginius strangles Appius, is admirably depicted. The lapse of the bereaved father's wrath for a moment, and his submissive acceptance of the story of Appius, with the sudden renewal of his rage as he imagines the wan, faded form of Virginia pointing to the guilty wretch, has in it all the fitfulness of insanity, and its way of holding on to an instinct of truth, spite of bewildered reason. The whole passage, in its truth and intensity, is the work of a poet, though of one who, in his effort to gasp out his feeling, often neglects the law of rhythm with an unconcern that is almost artless.

Our after-dinner talk turned one day on the subject of his plays. "The Hunchback" was evidently his favourite. He thought it went home to the audience more than anything he had done. He did not believe that he had entered into the nature of any of his heroines with so much delight and thoroughness as into that of Julia. "Not only," said the veteran, happily recalling his triumph—"not only was the house in tears, but Fanny Kemble and Mrs. Charles Kean wept both during rehearsal and performance." Julia, it is true, is the one figure of the play; but with her impulsive contrasts, the warmth of her affections contrasted with her love of admiration, her imperiousness under the rebuke of her prosperous lover, and her repentant yearning for him in her downfall, she atones to us for all the unlikelihood and mystery of

the piece. She was, when created—and in her best qualities let us believe she still is—the type of many true women, though countless copies of her have by this time impaired her freshness, and thus turned her very success to her disadvantage. Vulnerable as “The Hunchback” is in several respects, that it has commanded the stage for more than half a century proves a hold on public sympathy that cannot be shaken by pointing out its imperfections. Here, as in “*Virginius*,” and as in the comedy of “*The Love Chase*” overflowing with mirth and spirit, hearty feeling and truth to human nature carry all before them.

That the plays mentioned are the most popular of the writer’s cannot be doubted; yet as noble work of which stage success is not always the test, they are, to my thinking, surpassed by the neglected play entitled “*The Daughter*,” produced at Drury Lane in 1836. The play, indeed, is, on the whole, gloomy, though most powerful. It begins slowly, and its long introductory narrative would not be borne in our day, when vivid sensations must be forced at once into the ground-plot of the play, whether they have roots or not. Unfortunately, a real human interest has an awkward habit of requiring to grow. There was a time, however, when the durability of success was some set-off for its tardy attainment. Now, however, when life travels by express, there is no time for retrospect or compensation. To be once passed over is generally to be forgotten, though the “survival” is not always “to the fittest.” With a public that had leisure for appeals and real interest in high dramatic work, “*The Daughter*”

might, however, reinstate itself. Seldom has a condition of mind been more vividly realized than that of the wrecker's daughter, who has in vain tried to dissuade her father from his inhuman calling, and who, on this night, with a mind excited by terror, fears lest he may be tempted to worse guilt than that of plunder. She follows him into the night of storm:—

"I cannot light on him, and not a soul  
 I passed but I did question! Where is he?  
 My brain will burst! A horrible oppression  
 Hangs on me, and my senses do discharge  
 More than their proper parts. I see—I hear  
 Things that I should not! Forms are flitting by me.  
 Voices are in mine ears as if of things  
 That are—and yet I know are not! Each step  
 I fear to tumble o'er the body of  
 Some drowned man! There's one!—A heap of weeds!  
 Oh, what wild work do fear and fancy make!  
*Did some one cry?* Well? What?—Where are you?  
 No! 'Tis nobody! What is it still keeps up  
 This moaning in my ears, as if of words  
 Uttered in agony?"

Rough verse at times, doubtless; but how true to reality the state of feeling which it reveals! Only a poet's sympathy can so pierce and light up the being of another. And here is a lightning glimpse, with the horror of a wretch at the gallows—

*"How he did freeze  
 At the heat of the sun with the thought of the grave!  
 How life did stare at him from everything around him!—  
 Fields, horses, walls, stones, yea, the grisly frame  
 He stood on, his last footing-place in the world,  
 And he alone a spectacle of Death!"*

The italics in the quotations are mine. How powerful are the scenes between father and daughter, after the latter, heart-broken, has been compelled to bear witness against the former; how terrible the irony of the father,

changing to denunciation, as he reminds her of his jealous love and vigilance—

“Till words grew sobs,  
And love, overfraught, put what it loved away.”

Well conceived and graphic is the picture of Black Norris, a ruffian with stings of remorse which he cannot quite master, and, at times, with flashes of honesty in the midst of his guilt, as where he turns from the undeserved thanks of his victim—

“I do not like  
That any see me weep. I had as lief  
Be hanged as thanked;”

the shrinking nature of Wolf, Norris's creature, too weak either to combat sin or the torments of conscience;—all this must be commended in detail to the reader's attention, and, it may be hoped, to his admiration. Knowles's “William Tell,” though clever and striking, has scarcely the same high claims as “The Daughter.” William Tell, however, was for years one of Macready's most successful impersonations.

That there was a pious and reverent tone in Knowles's mind may be seen in nearly all his serious dramas. In the latter part of his career, general religious impressions took form in a practical creed. He joined the denomination of Baptists, frequently preached in London, and had, I believe, the charge of a Baptist Church in Scotland. On two occasions I heard him preach, each time at a chapel in the suburbs. Besides the characteristic zeal and solemnity which he threw into his remarks, there was little to distinguish his sermons from those of a preacher in general—little imagination and fancy, little speculation or originality of view.

It seemed a little remarkable that, on both occasions of hearing him, he read the same chapters in the course of the service; the first contained the visit of Nathan to David after the murder of Uriah; the second was the seventh chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. On mentioning this circumstance to a common friend, he informed me that it was Knowles's habit to read these two chapters, which (especially the first-named) gave considerable scope for his power of elocution. His reading certainly produced hushed attention on the part of his hearers.

The earnestness of Knowles's convictions made him benevolently desirous of impressing them upon others, and I had letters from him on religious topics, in which his theology seemed a shade too Calvinistic. There was much, however, that commanded a willing assent. At times these letters appealed to me to devote whatever faculty I had to the service of the Almighty while I was yet young. I answered Knowles that I humbly trusted to comply with his wish by continuing my dramatic work, and that I was persuaded, though less directly, he had not less earnestly employed himself in religious work in writing plays than now in preaching sermons. This view was probably consolatory to him, for his old yearning for the theatre was not extinct, and he was debating the question of producing one or two more of his plays then in MS., with a touching wish to hear from others that there was nothing in his doing so inconsistent with his strict Christian profession.

While simple piety, with the rest and the trust which it begets, naturally tends always

to cheerfulness, there is an ascetic tinge even in moderate Calvinism quite at variance with a genial nature like that of Knowles. I had heard that before I knew him he was the soul of mirth and good-fellowship. At times his gay and social nature would, even at a later period, kindle in the relation of an anecdote or in the utterance or enjoyment of some innocent jest; but there was, on the whole, a pensive gravity inconsistent with the stories of him that had once been current—anecdotes of the man whose overflow of life and hearty goodwill magnetized every new acquaintance; who gave and accepted impromptu invitations to dinner with a grasp of the hand and real heartiness, yet forgot them ere he had turned the street corner, and, accosted by some forgotten face, would reply to its owner with cheery fervour, make an excuse for quickly passing on, and then ask the name of his late interlocutor from a chance companion. If some of these traits produced a little inconvenience, they were, at all events, tokens of overflowing life in the possessor, and of his kind feeling towards others.

No more hearty or mercurial spirit in the best sense, perhaps, can be imagined than Knowles was in the vigour of his days. Mr. Bayle Bernard, who has already furnished me with more than one recollection of past days, gave me the following account of an incident which, as he told it, was a moral photograph of the dramatist.

Knowles, at the time referred to, had warm admirers in all parts of London. The heartiness of his nature, as evinced in his life, made even strangers his friends. One or two men in Camden Town, who knew him intimately, formed



the design of inviting him to a semi-public dinner at a tavern in the neighbourhood. The plan speedily found supporters, and the promoters of the dinner were besieged by applicants. Amongst them was a local tailor, whose enthusiasm for Knowles was nothing less than hero-worship. A ticket was accorded to him, and, after some deliberation, his earnest request that, on the poet's health being proposed, he might say a few words in support of the toast was complied with. Knowles was privately informed of the devotion of his sartorial admirer, and prepared for the possible display of eccentricity on his part. When the eventful moment of supporting the toast arrived, the tailor did credit to his cloth. "A tailor was, according to repute," he said, "only the ninth part of a man; but if so small a fraction of humanity as he could feel his heart overflow and his mind expand under the influence of Mr. Knowles's noble and stirring dramas, what would not be the effect of such works upon those happier individuals who could boast of being men in totality?" "My friend," said Knowles, in reply—"for though it has never been my good fortune to meet him before, I know that he is a friend—a friend to be prized,—my friend has observed, in allusion to a playful fiction, that he, as a tailor, is regarded only as the ninth part of a man; but I say, if you were to search for nine average men, it is more than doubtful whether the whole nine would, in worth and intellect, make up the ninth part of this tailor. Long life to him, gentlemen! I heartily propose his health!" As the tailor's "intellect" had been chiefly known by his praise of Knowles, this

compliment by the latter apparently savoured of egotism; but it sprang from the warmth of his heart, and had no such motive. "It was quite pathetic," said my informer, "to see how the dramatist's genial extravagance overwhelmed the poor fellow on whom it was lavished, who was only able to stammer out a few broken phrases by way of thanks."

Though when his feelings were engaged Knowles often showed a lively imagination, he was rather impatient of all descriptions which had a touch of hyperbole. In expressing to him my warm admiration of Mrs. Browning, I put one of her volumes into his hand. He opened it at "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." "What is this?" he cried—"resonant steam-eagles?" Here are the lines in which these words occur—

"She has halls and she has castles, and the resonant steam-eagles

Follow far, on the directing of her floating dove-like hand." \*

While admitting that "resonant steam-eagles" was a rather forced phrase for railway engines, I still contended that the entire passage was picturesque and full of stately grace. He was not to be convinced, however. "'Down the purple of this chamber tears should run at will'!" he quoted again, in a tone of hasty disapproval. "How can tears run down the purple of a chamber? Perhaps she means that the walls are damp." There was only one answer—that the literal test on which he insisted would be fatal to some of the most celebrated

\* In later editions these lines have been so altered that Knowles's objection is no longer applicable.

passages in poetry. I have a dim remembrance of persuading him to read "Bertha in the Lane," and of his being half converted by that noble and touching poem; but I have put the same poem into so many hands that my recollection of it in connection with Knowles may be erroneous.

During the latter part of his life he was much afflicted with rheumatism. I had occasional letters from my old friend, but saw nothing of him personally for some time before his death, at the age of seventy. It occurred at Torquay, November 30, 1862.

## CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME VESTRIS (MRS. C. J. MATHEWS).

Portraits of her—Her personal appearance and grace of manner—Her popularity as a ballad-singer—Her earlier successes in *Don Giovanni* in "*Giovanni in London*," as Captain Macheath, as *Apollo* in "*Midas*," as *Lydia Languish*, as *Letitia Hardy*—Her performances, when lessee of the *Olympic*, in "*One Hour; or, The Carnival Ball*," in "*The Loan of a Lover*," "*Beulah Spa*," "*The Black Domino*," "*You Can't Marry Your Grandmother*," "*Naval Engagements*," etc.—*Leigh Hunt's* opinion of her as singer and actress—Her popularity accounted for—Her love of dress, even to inconsistency—Cultivated a personal understanding with her audience—Her resemblance in this respect and in face to the late *Miss Neilson*—Occasionally offended with her patrons—Her visit with her husband to *America*—Invidiously treated by the press there—Enthusiastic reception on her return to the *Olympic*—Enters with *Mr. Mathews* on the management of *Covent Garden*—Her *Lady Teazle*—Her *Catherine* in *Sheridan Knowles's "Love"*—Her *Oberon* in "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*"—Her *Grace Harkaway* in "*London Assurance*"—Professional generosity to her rival, *Mrs. Nisbett*—Appears in *Knowles's "Old Maids"*—Goes with *Mr. Mathews* to the *Haymarket*—Plays very successfully in "*The Rencontre*," "*The Little Devil*," and "*Who's Your Friend?*"—Want of pathos—Report that she once played with *Talma* in "*Les Horaces*"—Traits of her in private—*Leigh Hunt's* tribute to her geniality and courtesy—Her long illness and death.

THE night on which I first saw *Madame Vestris*—I believe in 1836—has been already referred to in these *Recollections*. Her portraits in the print-shops had already made familiar to me a

face which, if not regularly beautiful, possessed lustrous eyes, a flexible mouth, somewhat open, and a forehead arched by abundant dark hair that fell in thick tresses upon her well-formed neck and sloping shoulders, while the general grace of her person and bearing was worthy the possessor of such a countenance. In her rich contralto voice she had sung "Cherry Ripe" and other ballads so ravishingly as to make them town talk. In Don Giovanni in "Giovanni in London," in Captain Macheath, in Apollo in "Midas," as well as in Lydia Languish, Letitia Hardy, and, later, in various burlettas at the Olympic, such as "One Hour; or, The Carnival Ball"—an insipid piece, which owed everything to her manner and the mercurial spirit of Mr. C. Mathews—"The Loan of a Lover" (in which, with admirable archness and *espieglerie*, she provoked the dull and dilatory advances of a lover capitally played by Keeley), "Beulah Spa," "The Black Domino," "You Can't Marry Your Grandmother," "Naval Engagements," etc., she was confessedly irresistible; and her charm was not the less that it is rather difficult to define it. Spite of her natural gifts, she had, as a singer, never gained a very high position; as an actress, criticism had never largely credited her with the power of painting character with depth or subtlety, though Leigh Hunt, on her appearance at Drury Lane in 1820, had spoken with delight of her possession of these qualities, and had even ascribed to her real tenderness and a delicate sense of relief and variety of emotion of which I am not fortunate enough to remember examples. That she had no title, however, to claim an eminent position either as vocalist or

actress, seems to have been the general impression. She had, however, with playgoers, such great popularity, that to seek for the grounds of it may not be uninteresting.

In the first place, though she could not boast the highest qualifications for her profession, she had some that stand the owner in even better stead. Her voice in a ballad had great expression, and, to use Leigh Hunt's words, "all the ripeness of the South in it." She was charmingly arch and vivacious, with a happy carelessness which helped effect, with an occasional air of playful *mutinerie* that increased public favour by her evident consciousness of it. Let it be added that she never failed to give her personal attraction the advantage of rich and tasteful costume, and that she was such a votary of elegance in dress, that she would display it even in rustic or humble characters. That a silk skirt, a lace-edged petticoat, a silk stocking, a shoe of satin or patent leather, would never have been worn by some of the characters she personated, was of no more concern to her on the ground of consistency than were their rich attires to Marie Antoinette and the ladies of her court, when they masqueraded as shepherdesses and milkmaids in the grounds of the Petit Trianon. Like Miss Neilson, in later days she cultivated a personal understanding with her audience. Indeed, there was so much likeness of face and, at times, of expression between her and the young *tragédienne*, that a portrait now before me of the former actress might easily be supposed that of the latter. It was, I fancy, her practice of taking the house into her confidence, combined with her coquetry and personal

attractions, that rendered Vestris so bewitching to the public. When she sang, she looked with a questioning archness at her audience, as if to ask, "Do you enjoy that as I do? Did I give it with tolerable effect?" And though in the delivery of dialogue she could hardly be called keen or brilliant, she knew what mischief and retort meant. When she had given a sting to the latter, she would glance round, as to ask for approval, with a smile that seemed to say, "I was a little severe there. He felt that, I suppose?" She had on the stage, either real or assumed, the abstraction of a spoiled favourite. Thus, on the night of my first seeing her—as Psyche, I think, in "Olympic Revels"—she would at times seem absorbed in contemplating her dress, in adjusting a sleeve or a fold of the skirt, or she would drop her eye in reverie upon the point of her pink satin *bottine*. Of a sudden she would affect to wake to consciousness, and cast a trustful and appealing glance on the house, then become demure and staid, as one who felt that she had taxed indulgence. She had skill enough not to carry these little pantomimic contrasts too far, and to enhance them by fits of reserve. She was capable, however, of taking serious umbrage and of openly expressing it. During her management of Covent Garden, I entered late one night, and found that some accidental circumstance had elicited the disapprobation of the house. "Vestris is in a temper," said my informant, "and shows it." This I found to be quite true. She pouted through her comic scenes with a sullen brow, and with a haste and a negligence so marked that, unless she had been the *enfant gaté* of the



house, her almost contemptuous indifference might well have brought on her an emphatic rebuke. Before quitting the Olympic, however, she paid a visit with her husband to America, where the press treated them somewhat invidiously. On returning to her little theatre in Wych Street, she was hailed with absolute transport, with that excitement of delight which only a few favourites in any age are privileged to arouse.

Bewitching as Vestris was in the sparkling trifles of the Olympic, pieces of a higher stamp showed the limits of her resources. Soon after entering with Mr. Mathews on the management of Covent Garden, she played Lady Teazle. In the humours of the part, in the wheedling of Sir Peter, her quizzical speeches at Lady Sneerwell, and in a general air of restless animation she was very happy; but to show traces of the *ci-devant* country girl in the town lady, or to hint at times the deeper nature which made repentance likely, were problems which the actress did not even attempt to solve. Her Lydia Languish I never saw, but I have heard it much commended, and probably justly, since it was far more within her range than Lady Teazle. In the Catherine of Knowles's "Love," produced in 1839 at Covent Garden, Madame Vestris was quite in her element. She had to stimulate, often in male disguise, a sincere but slow and taciturn lover; to send him on her errands, and jest at his delay or non-apprehension; to reflect on his courage, challenge him to fight, and then cleverly evade the meeting. In her disguise of young gallant, to affect to him that she (Catherine) had broken her ankle and limped, that her waist went "zig-zag," that her

complexion was ruined, that she had squandered her wealth; to exult, with a roguish smile, that his honest heart was still faithful to her, then once more to quarrel and order him to his knees, and, when the incensed knight at last rebelled, to throw off her page-ship's cloak, and reveal his tormenting but loving Catherine,—this was comedy, not very brilliant, and, at last, rather tiresome, but quite suited to Madame Vestris—comedy in which she delighted.

In the character just sketched, she was tolerably successful, and gave sufficient relief to the serious interest of the play. In 1840, when "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was revived at Covent Garden, she represented Oberon with much elegance, if not with all the appreciation of the text that might have been desired. As Grace Harkaway in "London Assurance," also produced at Covent Garden, Madame Vestris gave effective help, though there is in this character a touch of sentiment which was hardly within her reach. Her acceptance, however, of a part quite subordinate to the Lady Gay Spanker of Mrs. Nisbett, deserves to be mentioned as one of several examples of her professional liberality to a rival.

In 1841 she appeared at Covent Garden, as one of the heroines of Sheridan Knowles's "Old Maids." Her part was that of a fashionable coquette with a giddy nature and good heart. Her Lady Blanche was diverting and captivating, but the comedy lacked strength of story, and even force and originality of character.

Soon after resigning the lesseeship of Covent Garden, Madame Vestris and Mr. Charles Mathews accepted an engagement at the Hay-

market. There the favourite actress still proved attractive in pieces somewhat like those which she produced at the Olympic—in “The Rencontre,” in which she played to the life a lively and intriguing domestic; in the witcheries of “The Little Devil,” a version of Scribe’s “La Part du Diable;” and in that charming drama of court life in masquerade, “Who’s Your Friend?” where her appropriate and telling part was that of an amateurish dairywoman, with page and footman to hold her parasol and to carry her milk-pail. In this piece, throughout, as in her own particular character, there was a union of elegance and mirth in which she never failed to excel. Her excellence, indeed, lay in charming *genre* drama, and in mythological and other extravaganzas, rather than in pure comedy, though examples have been named of her success in the latter, when her part involved humours rather than deeper characteristics. A touch of passion or pathos, such as sometimes blends with humour, I never caught from her, and one cannot read the statement that she once played Camille in “Les Horaces,” to Talma, at the Théâtre Français, without a smile.

I must dwell no longer, however, upon an actress who was probably more fascinating than any of her time. She was reported to be extravagant, fond of luxury, jewels, dress, and domestic pets. She had a passion for spaniels, of which she possessed some rare specimens. On the testimony of those who knew her well, she was at times whimsical and arrogant with her equals; but, with errors which I am not called upon to notice further, she was generous, liberal, humane, and capable of inspiring warm attachment, espe-

cially in those whom she met behind the scenes at the theatre.

Meeting Leigh Hunt at dinner shortly after the production of "The Legend of Florence," I was pleased with his warm mention of her. Her frank goodwill and courtesy as manageress during rehearsal had fairly carried away one whose appreciation of manner was delicate even to fastidiousness. His enthusiasm for her was only second to that which he showed for Ellen Tree, the heroine of his play.

After a long and painful illness, Lucy Elizabeth Vestris (Mrs. Charles Mathews) passed on August 8, 1856, from a scene in which she had once shone with as much brilliancy as any of her rivals, whom, indeed, she excelled in personal captivation. At the time of her death she had reached her fifty-ninth year.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## MRS. NISBETT (LADY BOOTHBY).

Her beauty—Her personal appearance described—Comparison between her and Vestris—Her laugh—In 1835 manages the little Queen's Theatre in Tottenham Street, afterwards the Prince of Wales's—Plays there a sentimental part, that of a gipsy girl—Carries the piece by her beauty, without a touch of pathos—Appears there also in "The Married Rake," and in "Catching an Heiress"—Her acting in these pieces—Her enjoyment of fun—Substitutes Madame Vestris at the Olympic, in 1838—Distinguishes herself in "The Idol's Birthday"—The piece and her acting in it described—Her Beatrice—Its excess of mirth—Her Rosalind brilliant, but deficient in tenderness—Compared with Helen Faucit's—Her Lady Teazle—Excellent as Helen in "The Hunchback"—Her triumph as Constance in "The Love Chase"—Achieves a kindred success as Lady Gay Spanker in "London Assurance"—Her death.

MRS. NISBETT, who was almost as much the rage as Vestris herself, in the opinion of many surpassed her in beauty. Her forehead, though rather low, was wide, her eyes brilliant and expressive; the oval of her clear face was relieved and thrown out by a waving wreath of dark hair. Her neck was long and stately, her form lithe and elastic, and her stature tall. She had even more animation than Vestris, but not the insinuating languor with which the latter sometimes contrasted it. She was an immense favourite, but it was less her wont than that of

Vestris to indulge in those little arts of pantomime by which an actress appeals personally to her admirers. Mrs. Nisbett had a laugh which swept away and charmed one by its freshness and fulness, by its music, and by its union of refinement with *abandon*. She was, on the whole, a finer actress than her rival; she had keener perceptions of character and consistency. If the latter beat her in seductive charm of look and manner, and in the art of sending out telegraphic glances, she had not that delight in mirth and those boundless animal spirits which, with Mrs. Nisbett, created an infection of enjoyment. Her charm was less subtle, and even less deep, than that of Vestris, but it was freer and less artificial. Both actresses were accomplished in fascination and captivation, but Vestris excelled in the former, Nisbett in the latter.

My earliest recollections, now but faint, of Louisa Cranstoun Nisbett, date from about 1835, when, for a brief space, she managed the little Queen's Theatre, since so well-known as the Prince of Wales's. At this house, to the best of my knowledge, she made her only effort in serious drama. She played the part of a gipsy girl, and looked so pensively lovely with her olive complexion set off by a red kerchief, that I, like the rest of the audience, forgave or forgot the utter absence of one touch of genuine pathos. It was at this little theatre, too, that she performed Mrs. Trietrac in "The Married Rake," and Caroline Gayton in "Catching an Heiress." She delighted one in these parts by her winning archness, and especially by the spirit with which she bore herself in her male disguises, and by her enjoyment of the fun.

The dictum of Horace, that he who would move tears should also shed them, finds, as a general rule, its corollary in the truth that the performer most likely to call forth mirth is one who himself revels in it. Those cases are, of course, to be excepted in which the stolidity of the actor is part of the humour, or in which his cue is for a while to mask his enjoyment by a grave reticence.

In 1838 Mrs. Nisbett was the substituted attraction at the Olympic for Madame Vestris, during the absence of the latter in America. In no piece at this theatre was Mrs. Nisbett seen to greater advantage than in "The Idol's Birthday," produced in 1838. The little comedy itself is a piece with a central idea very takingly illustrated. The time is the reign of Queen Anne. The scene is a stately, old-fashioned garden, with its hedges fantastically cut into quaint devices, with here or there an urn or statue by way of relief. The "idol" character, personated by Mrs. Nisbett, is a young heiress and reigning beauty. It is her birthday. A negro page, quaintly and richly attired, goes before her, her women in attendance follow, and she is surrounded by a court of gallants, each of whom competes for her smiles and aspires to her hand. Seldom has there been a prettier stage picture than this formal but pleasant garden thronged by figures richly attired in the set but courtly fashion of the day, and offering their homage to the "idol," whose costume was a triumph of fancy and elegance. Either this piece gave the actress more scope than usual for characterization, or she chose to throw into it more. Always skilful in seizing the



marked features of a part, it was seldom that she showed so much subtlety and depth as in the one referred to. With what an air of condescension and weariness, just masked by good breeding, did she receive the homage of her admirers, which she seemed to permit rather for their pleasure than her own! This indifference, however, was but feigned. At heart the spoiled heiress exulted in her sway, and longed to extend it. How great, then, was the shock when rumoured loss of her wealth and position turned her flatterers into cynical satirists, who jested at her pretensions, and even decried her beauty!

Mrs. Nisbett's acting, when she found herself dethroned and forsaken, was really perfect. Surprise, mortification, grief, and anger, were so naturally represented, that the house was at once amused and touched. In the end, the spoiled favourite, cured of her vain ambition, marries one who can admonish as well as love. Mrs. Nisbett, it has been said, was not a pathetic actress; but she exhibited as much grace and pensiveness as this little Watteau picture required. She rattled with overflowing gaiety through Beatrice in "Much Ado About Nothing," though the transitions of mood were not sufficiently marked, and at times she indulged in mirth when her very seriousness should have created it in the audience.

Her Rosalind was much like her Beatrice. Gay, mischievous, it carried one away by its exhilarating animal spirits, which never sank into coarseness; but of that higher and tenderer side which Helen Faucit so charmingly revealed, and which made the very buoyancy of the character spring from its purity of feeling, she

had scarcely a glimpse. She was a whimsical, brilliant, tantalizing, charming Lady Teazle, without much depth in her repentance, and she was the best Helen in "The Hunchback" I ever saw. The forwardness of this young lady has been pushed by some actresses so far, and with so much deliberation, as to be somewhat distasteful. The reader, now and then, may have seen a Helen whom any bachelor of taste would have tolerated as a romp, and avoided as a wife. With Mrs. Nisbett, however, there was so much impulse in the raillery of her Cousin Modus, such a love of teasing mingled with her liking for him, so dancing a light in the eye, such a just perception of the point to which she might go, and still be womanly, that nothing was too set in intention, or greatly too bold in manner.

The character, however, in which Mrs. Nisbett won her chief triumph, was undoubtedly that of Constance, in Sheridan Knowles's "Love Chase." In her sprightly jests on the overwhelmed Wildrake, what delightful mischief; in the picture of the chase with which she enchanted him, what humour, animation, and enjoyment! So free and wild were her spirits, that animal life, by its transports, soared into poetry, and the joys of sense rose into emotion. Things not to be forgotten were her light, rollicking laugh in this part, her face half convulsed with the mirth she affects to restrain, when, reminding Wildrake of a past misfortune in the hunting-field, she cries, "And, prythee, mind thy horse; don't balk his leap." As for the description of the chase just mentioned, it became on her lips the model for all after-excellence of the same kind.

Lady Gay Spanker in "London Assurance," is, to a great extent, a prose, "Neighbour Constance." In Lady Gay, however, Mrs. Nisbett had a chance of varying her bolder outlines by the drollery of her indulgence to her husband, "little Dolly."

This brilliant actress, later known as Lady Boothby, had been some time absent from the stage when she died, at the age of forty-six, in January, 1858.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## MR. CHARLES MATHEWS.

*Debut* of Charles Mathews at the Olympic, December, 1835—Appears with Liston (a friend of his father's) in "The Old and Young Stager"—Description of the piece, and the acting of Mathews and Liston—Mathews in "One Hour; or, The Carnival Ball," "He Would be an Actor," and "Patter *versus* Clatter"—Enters with his wife upon the management of Covent Garden—Tries a higher range of characters—His Charles Surface, Puff in "The Critic," Dazzle in "London Assurance," Captain Smike in Jerrold's "Bubbles of the Day"—Remarks on the last-named comedy and its cast—Mathews as Sir Charles Coldstream in "Used Up," and as Sir Affable Hawk in "A Game of Speculation"—His acting in these two great successes described—Summary of him as an actor—Appears as a countryman in "Who's Your Friend?" and as Chorus in the extravaganza of "The Golden Fleece"—Marries, in 1857, Mrs. Davenport, an American actress—Appears with her at the Haymarket—A final glimpse of him in private—The author of various successful pieces—His death.

It seems only like yesterday that, in December, 1835, I saw the *début*, at the Olympic, of this distinguished son of a distinguished father. In "The Old and Young Stager," written by W. Leman Rede, also appeared Liston (friend of the elder Mathews), as a staid old coachman, to induct his son into the mysteries of the whip and the road. In the persons of the two Stagers, the talk was, of course, made to turn upon the stage theatrical, so that the piece abounded in allusions

to the Mathews (*père et fils*) and to Liston. The elder comedian, with his elongated face, his solemn self-complacency of look and manner, and his oracular voice, was the model of a stage dignitary, while still youthful in appearance, with well-defined features, florid complexion, and light, wavy hair. Charles Mathews, in his arch, easy gaiety—toned down by respect to Liston—was to some extent, as the stage novice, a sort of aristocratic prototype of Sam Weller. "One Hour; or, The Carnival Ball," soon followed, which owed all its attraction to the fascinating manner of Vestris and the ease and spirit of Mathews. Then "He Would be an Actor" (from a French source) and "Patter *versus* Clatter" gave him scope for showing nearly as much variety as consisted with his light loquacious or mercurial style. In the former piece he played several characters, amongst them those of a French-woman and a gardener, and sang his Welsh ballad of "Jenny Jones," which for a time was the rage. In "Patter *versus* Clatter" his mere volubility was surprising. To vent such a torrent of well-articulated talk, delivered with such an overflow of animal spirits, was in itself a feat. In the pieces above-named—typical of those which he generally played at the Olympic—he won his chief successes at that house.

When, in 1839, he entered with his wife (formerly Madame Vestris) upon the management of Covent Garden, parts and characters of greater importance engaged his attention. He now played Charles Surface with lightness and effect, though not quite, it was said, with Charles Kemble's delicate touches and fine transition of character.

In 1840 he appeared as Puff in "The Critic." His rattling spirits in the first act, where he describes his system of gulling the public; his full satisfaction, in the second act, with the rehearsal of his piece; his significant changes of voice as he alternately instructs the actor, or explains his plot to Dangle and Sneer, or, with smiling coolness, sets aside all their common-sense objections, resulted in so good a success that Puff became one of his stock parts.

In 1841, on the production of "London Assurance," he was the original Dazzle. Imperturbable, full of resource, and prepared for all contingencies, he was the very ideal of the part. Some years later he doubled the character of Puff with that of Sir Fretful Plagiary. Generally Mr. Mathews imported a good deal of his own personality into his various assumptions. In portraying, however, the vain, irritable, and thin-skinned Sir Fretful, he managed to contrast him effectively with Puff.

Early in 1842 he appeared at Covent Garden, as Captain Snike, in Douglas Jerrold's comedy, "Bubbles of the Day." A very lifelike bit of acting was that of the comedian in this comedy, the coolness and insolent mendacity of an unscrupulous adventurer being hit off in a manner as natural as it was telling, and his share of the dialogue given with that happy carelessness which brings out the wit and humour of a part, without obvious intention. "Bubbles of the Day" is, perhaps, the most brilliant of all Jerrold's comedies. It was supported by an admirable cast, which included Farren, Charles Mathews, Harley, Lacy, F. Mathews, Meadows, Wigan, Mrs. Nisbett, Mrs. W. West (once a leading and

popular actress, with considerable pathos), Mrs. Orger (an excellent impersonator of eccentric parts, and at times, as in this case, of soubrettes), and Mrs. Walter Lacy (spite of a little self-consciousness, equally skilled in the grave and the gay), the accomplished wife of an accomplished actor. The wit of the dialogue and the merits of the performers failed to recommend a work which had nothing delightful in the way of character or striking in that of story.

Amongst those characters of which he was the English original, Sir Charles Coldstream in "Used Up," played at the Haymarket, in 1844, and Mr. Affable Hawk in "A Game of Speculation" (from De Balzac's "Mercadet"), played at the Lyceum, in 1851, stand pre-eminent. To his excellence in the former drama, universal testimony was borne. The idea of "Used Up" (*L'homme blasé*) is very happy; and though the last act wants unity and breadth of incident, Sir Charles Coldstream, first as the victim of ennui, and then as the man who recovers the zest of life, presents a very diverting contrast, enriched with various touches so suited to Mathews, that the part might have been written for him. The sense of boredom was capitally expressed by the actor—not too strongly insisted on, for that would have betrayed interest, but with a careless lassitude that showed its genuineness. The man who, from Dan to Beersheba, had found all barren, was no longer surprised, and his despondency had in it a sort of listless resignation. Very droll, it seems, was the manner between hope and fear in which he sees in the notion of marriage a possible excitement, and yet distrusts it, like a disheartened



patient who has tried many remedies in vain. His prompt attempt to carry out the notion by proposing to Lady Clatterbuck, who solicits him for a charity, then his forgetfulness that he had meant to propose to her, and his way of calling her back and offering her his hand, as if presenting her with a forgotten glove, were full of effortless humour in which he excelled. Excellent, too, was the air of dispassionate politeness in which he ran through the statistics of his property, and placed himself at her disposal. Matrimony might arouse him to interest, and he courteously hid his doubts. The first act gave scope to his languor and *nonchalance*, the second to his vivacity and enjoyment of the absurd. A suspected murderer, disguised as a ploughboy, because he has accidentally fallen with his adversary into the river—restoration of Sir Charles to hearty interest in life by this too stimulating position was capitally handled. His forgetfulness of his disguise before the master who had hired him, and his sudden correction of himself; the delighted voracity with which he gulped down his soup; his aside comments on his ungrateful legatees, who, believing him also drowned, abused their benefactor; his horror at seeing the man he was supposed to have murdered half emerge from a trap; his frantic efforts to keep him down, and his final exultation at finding the suspected ghost still flesh and blood, gave countless chances for displaying his colloquial ease, quiet irony, his sense of farcical terror and boundless spirit. Sir Charles Coldstream, perhaps, more than any other character, showed his powers in combination.

The merits of Mr. Charles Mathews in this

character are, however, almost equalled by those of his Mr. Affable Hawk. Never was a part in comedy presented with more moderation than that of the distressed and scheming speculator, never a like part with more effect. Indeed, here, as in the various other characters of this actor, moderation was a large element in success. Mathews's, indeed, was not that so-called moderation which is a weak compromise between extravagance and tameness; it was the desire to keep close to truth, to adhere strictly to the sentiments and habits of a typical man of the day. In the careless air with which he extracts money from a domestic; in the bland superiority with which he defends this meanness to his wife, by showing her that fortune at times turns upon the most trifling pivot; in the look of conviction with which he hoodwinks the rapacious Hardacre; in the assumed hauteur with which he daunts the coarse but cunning Grossmark—there was not a tone, look, or gesture which might not have been employed by a City man of the time. The curt, business-like manner, contrasting with his usual placidity, in which he dispels the last suspicions of a creditor by threatening to *pay* him—that is, to close accounts—was a triumph of unscrupulous ingenuity. The veriest admirer of Charles Mathews could scarcely have credited him with the gift of pathos; but, in this particular part, his reluctance to use the money of the humble clerk who loves his daughter was almost affecting, and so humanizing was his touch of unselfishness, that it made one too indulgent to the swindler. On the other hand, hypocrisy has seldom indeed been so skilfully masked. The colloquial ease and absence of

strain in the various stratagems made them to the last degree plausible, while his changes of expression, and certain familiar, everyday actions, gave life and point to the dialogue. A finger inserted in a waistcoat-pocket, the deprecatory movement of an arm, or the flourish of a handkerchief, gave with him as much emphasis in comedy as the heroic gesture of serious actors have given in tragedy. He painted nature, indeed, in his own way, as truly as did the most poetical actors; but it was the artificial nature of society. In comedies written for a whole company, rather than for a star, such as "Old Heads and Young Hearts," and "Time Works Wonders," his ease, coolness, and incisive characterization rendered excellent service. He was the English original of Giles, the Somersetshire Yeoman, in "Who's Your Friend?" and, except that his rusticity might have been a trifle broader, he entered delightfully into the humours of that quaint creation.

In 1845, at the Haymarket, he played the part of Chorus in "The Golden Fleece," an extravaganza burlesquing "The Medea of Euripides." The Chorus was comprised in the single person of the actor, whose airs of importance, droll comments on the action of the piece, and sympathetic identification of himself with its various humours, rendered him highly attractive in a somewhat novel conception.

Mr. Mathews's powers, though brilliant, were limited to light comedy. He had not even so much faculty for blending sentiment with humour as the elder Mr. Sothern (who resembled him in several points) at times exhibited. But for ease and gentlemanly bearing, for coolness in

the face of a difficulty, for happy self-abandonment to a humorous impulse, at times for elegant languor or mischievous love of frolic—all shown with the art that hides art, he had, perhaps, no equal in his generation.

In 1857, after the death of his first celebrated wife, he married Mrs. Davenport, an actress of no inconsiderable talent, with whom he appeared in various pieces at the Haymarket. The last time that I saw him was at a theatrical supper, given by the late Mr. Bateman, in Albemarle Street. The gay comedian, the cause of so much gaiety to others, though smiling and agreeable, seemed silent and thoughtful. For myself, I recalled pensively the dim resemblance between the sharp and time-worn outline of the face before me, and that flushed with spirits and success which I had seen on the night of his *début*.

Mr. Mathews was the author of various successful pieces, chiefly adaptations. A version of Foote's, "Liar," and a comedy called "My Awful Dad," were amongst the last in which he performed. His death took place at the age of seventy-four, in June, 1878.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## MR. G. V. BROOKE.

Mr. Brooke makes his first appearance in London at the Olympic Theatre, in 1848—Great expectations formed of him—His *Othello* greeted with enthusiasm—His personal advantages—His acting in "*Othello*" described—Favourable verdict of the Press generally—John Forster and other dissentients—Brooke's *Othello* compared with Salvini's—Brooke falls off in this part after the night of his *début*—His *Hamlet*, Sir Giles Overreach, etc.—Personal acquaintance with him—He appears in author's tragedy of "*Philip of France*," in 1850—His slow conception a contrast to his force of execution—His acting in "*Philip of France*"—That of Miss Helen Faucit—Mr. Brooke in private—His death in the catastrophe of the *London*, 1866.

MR. G. V. BROOKE made his first appearance in London at the Olympic Theatre, then under the management of Mr. Henry Spicer, in 1848. The fame of the provincial tragedian had preceded him to London, so that his first audience included many of the celebrities of the day. The play was "*Othello*," and the reception of Mr. Brooke in this character was not merely noisy and vehement, but truly enthusiastic. He had moved the passions and sympathies of the house—not only that sort of admiration which is called forth by a fine person, accomplished declamation, and executive skill in general. All these latter advantages, however, he possessed—tall, well-

proportioned, with a musical voice of great compass, and a countenance which, although singularly mild in private, could reflect on the stage the most varied passions. On the first night of his *Othello*, however, one had to look deeper than to external accomplishments for the secret of his success. At the end of the third act the house was in a fever of delight. The acclamations which recalled the actor subsided only into a restless murmur of applause. Knots of impromptu critics gathered together in boxes and lobby. In the pit, looks and gestures and a hum of delight expressed the general verdict; and outside the theatre a crowd, attracted by the rumour of the effect produced, recalled the account given of the scene outside Drury Lane on Edmund Kean's first appearance. So far, indeed, Brooke's triumph had been deserved. His address to the senate had been full of simple dignity, and of fervent, though restrained, feeling. He showed like dignity in the second act, in his rebuke to Cassio; while his growing wrath—of which one caught a gleam in the words—

“If I once stir,  
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you  
Shall sink in my rebuke,”

gave a terrible hint of what its explosion might be. The passage in the third act, beginning—

“Why, why is this?”

was admirably given. The actor's manner was open, clear, warm, and yet temperate; and one saw with what loyalty to Desdemona he fought against his rising doubts. In the concluding lines of the speech, the tone of expostulation with Iago was exchanged for one abrupt and peremptory,

and the last line with a sudden and passionate energy that carried all before it; while afterwards the great burst—

“If thou dost slander her and torture me,”

expressed to the height the frenzy of the Moor's mind—his mingled rage and agony. The enthusiasm aroused was immense. With the exception of Salvini, I have seen no actor so powerful at this crisis. It may be briefly said that, to the end of the tragedy, Mr. Brooke maintained the ascendancy he had won. The line in the fifth act—

“O, fool! fool! fool!”

recalled what I had read of its utterance by the elder Kean. With Brooke, however, it was so natural and so just, that imitation could hardly have been suspected. The word “fool” was pronounced in the first instance with blended amazement and remorse, in the second with a musing, lingering sense of his own fatuity as Iago's dupe, and in the third with the quiet hopelessness of one who feels the past irrevocable. The press generally welcomed the new tragedian scarcely less warmly than did the public. There were one or two critics, however, who, like John Forster, were such partisans of Macready, that they could not admit, nor, perhaps, even see, tragic excellence out of that great actor.

Salvini's Othello has been already glanced at. It can hardly be said that Brooke's Othello, even at its best, was equal to Salvini's. The former, for instance, could never have given us that grand piece of psychology which occurs in the third act, where Salvini, having trampled on Iago, stands awhile mute and vacant, then, with a distressed and courteous air, raises the fallen man, and leads



him to his seat. What finer illustration could be given of the mental chaos that follows the Moor's fury? For the moment Othello has forgotten his misery and his rage, and wonders at the sight of the prostrate tempter.

There was, nevertheless, one feature in Brooke's passion which made me prefer it to Salvini's. It had more of the irregularity and the sudden contrasts which denote extreme tension of feeling. If excitement ran ever so high, it would at times be driven back, as advancing waves are sometimes by meeting a gale. There would be frequently a momentary lull, a false calm of irony, ere the tide again gathered and leaped on. With all its grandeur and force, Salvini's passion lacked I thought, at times the contrast and the variety I have indicated. It was somewhat too measured and uniform—a sea that rolled on majestically and irresistibly, but that had no convulsion; it did not turn and eddy with the wind.

I saw Brooke's Othello on several subsequent occasions, but I never knew it to attain the force shown on the night of his *début*. The reason for this is not obvious, except we adopt the supposition that the actor's power had declined after the stimulant of a first night. Be this as it may, the performance, while retaining its mechanical outline and its elocutionary grace, had lost much of that reality which the spectator feels when passion dictates expression.

On Brooke's return to London after a long absence, he made an approach in Othello to his first excellence. This might be due to the excitement of a reappearance. But his acting, like his person, was become coarser, and his voice somewhat husky. I saw him at various times in

Hamlet, in Sir Giles Overreach, and several other characters. In all these were particular scenes in which he made an effect ; but it was a good deal due to physical energy. He showed little subtlety of apprehension or emotion, nothing that recalled the first night of his Othello.

I became acquainted with Brooke in 1856, when my tragedy of "Marie de Meranie" was produced by the late Mr. Farren at the Olympic. The tragedian had been chosen to play Philip Augustus to the Marie of Miss Helen Faucit. Not having been present at the reading, he asked me to go over his part with him. I was amazed to find a man who was, at all events, an accomplished executant, so slow in forming his conception. Often where the meaning of the text seemed to me too obvious for doubt, he would inquire anxiously and repeatedly as to the manner in which it should be delivered. He was at that time an established favourite, and it was curious to hear him asking questions that almost any tyro in his art could have solved. He had not a tinge of conceit ; he threw himself frankly and unhesitatingly upon his author's guidance, which he implicitly followed, but showed at rehearsal a lassitude in going through his part which scarcely promised brilliant results. This possibly arose from the state of his throat. The powers of his voice were so much impaired, that when he put a strain on them the effect seemed as distressing to the listener as to himself. However, on the night of production, by skilful management, an imposing bearing, and a dashing outline of the character, he accomplished far more than had been expected. His performance seemed to me wanting in subtle touches and in *innerness* (if the

phrase may be used) of emotion. But this opinion may have been somewhat unfair. The acting of Miss Helen Faucit in Marie, who had fathomed every motive of a character which she expounded not only with supreme truth and passion in its crises, but with a power to touch, with the most delicate precision, the right tones of feeling, tended to make an author unduly exacting as to the performer associated with her. I must not risk the suspicion of magnifying a work of my own by dwelling on the genius of one of its representatives; but I may be allowed to say that the Marie of Miss Faucit gave, so far as her part allowed, one of those ideal pictures of womanhood, of boundless devotion, and exalted purity which often impressed the spectator with something of a religious sanctity, and made reverence blend with admiration.

In the course of an evening which Mr. Brooke spent with me, I found him a very agreeable companion. He did not affect great interest in matters unconnected with the stage, but in discussing these was by no means an egotist. He talked little of himself—chiefly of things theatrical in Dublin, of those who had been special favourites there, and of the wild enthusiasm of Irish audiences, compared with which the approval of an English public, he said, seemed generally tame and dispiriting. His manners were quiet, unaffected, and courteous. In private, there was nothing of the great tragedian about him. The sad circumstances of his death on board the *London*, in 1866, are well known.

## CHAPTER XX.

## MR. CHARLES DILLON.

An actor of emotional, rather than of intellectual gifts—His acting in "Belphegor," "Hamlet," "Othello," "Macbeth"—New and undesigned effect produced in the banquet-scene—His Louis the Eleventh—His acting in "A Hard Struggle"—Warm commendation of Charles Dickens—Dillon's acting in comedy—In "The King's Musketeers" and "Love's Amazements"—Leigh Hunt—Dillon's personal appearance—His power of facial expression—Visits the United States and Australia—Deterioration in his appearance and in his acting on his return—Plays Manfred at the Princess's—Appears at Drury Lane—Over-convivial habits—Aristocratic friends—Apparent disrelish of their society—Oddities of expression respecting them—His alterations in Leigh Hunt's comedy of "Love's Amazements"—Too indulgent as a manager—Want of discipline in the theatre—Jealous vanity of one of his actors—Subsides again into a provincial player, with corresponding habits—His death in the provinces.

MR. CHARLES DILLON was an actor of great emotional gifts, but very deficient in intellectual ones. So long as he was under the impulse of feeling, gay or grave, he could act with great power, force, and delicacy. In the mountebank Belphegor, a deserted husband, his grief, from the first moment of bewildered, half-stupefying apprehension of his loss to the full agony of proof, was rendered not only with marvellous power, but with the most minute and subtle touches. A stifled cry as he entered the

abandoned room, a sudden transformation as he turned from it, bowed in frame and feeble of limb, mute despair on his face, but no violence, showed fine restraint, no less than emotional intensity. But it was the good taste begotten of feeling, which instinctively springs from it, and which does not proceed from those dictates of judgment and reflection, without obeying which, in complex characters, the most passionate actor must be at sea. Charles Dillon often reached psychological truth by an impulse; he had, however, no psychological discernment.

In Hamlet, he gave the great scene with Ophelia with considerable effect, beginning the interview with bitterness and distrust, and gradually subsiding into a sad recollection of past faith and love's tender enchantment, then hurrying away as if he could not bear the retrospect. Hamlet's situation in the play-scene was rendered, if somewhat superficially, with great stage-skill. It produced much excitement. But for any clear conception of the chief character, or for any exhibition of his mental development, the auditor waited in vain. Mr. Dillon seemed to hurry over the meditative passages as if they arrested the action, and the "To be, or not to be," was given with a carelessness which betrayed the actor's ignorance of a crisis in Hamlet's mental history. Mr. Dillon was also unfortunately wanting in dignity of bearing. He could ruffle it tolerably in a gaily-slashed doublet; but in Hamlet's mourning weeds he was almost as wanting in "presence" as in the dress of a gentleman of his own time.

In Othello, Mr. Dillon, finding that he could not rise to the Moor, adapted the Moor to the

capacities of Mr. Dillon. Without majesty, without restraint, with the chafe and fret of passion, but without its volume and under-swell, he painted the character with doting tenderness, and deplored the supposed betrayal of his love with such moderate resentment that it was surprising he should have avenged it. Nevertheless, his tenderness was very genuine, and gradually penetrated the audience.

With *Lear*, again, which I saw at Sadler's Wells, and, it may be added, with Sheridan Knowles's *Virginius*, he dealt as with *Othello*, eliminating in a great measure the heroic elements, often missing the intellectual links, and devoting himself to the pathetic side of the character.

In his *Macbeth* there was no subtlety, no deep and cunning revelation of the inner struggle. On the other hand, his remorse was displayed with riveting power. The horror with which he repelled Lady Macbeth's injunction to return to the scene of the murder, and the agony of his exit—"Wake Duncan with thy knocking," etc., were not surpassed in mere intensity by any actor I have seen, though there was a sense in the spectator that the agitation of the passions, however real, wanted the charm of dignity for its completeness. In the third act, the reality of the actor's agony when apostrophizing the ghost of Banquo, was novel and startling. He clutched his collar in a frenzy of terror, and tore it aside piecemeal, till the scattered links strewed the ground; while the cry, "Hence! hence! horrible shadow, unreal mockery, hence!" was rather yelled than spoken. The truthful intensity of his horror atoned in a great degree for some violence in its expression. At the conclusion

of the play I congratulated Mr. Dillon upon the effect he had produced in this scene, and then learnt, to my surprise, that the tearing asunder of the gorget had been done unconsciously in the excitement of the scene. "However," said Dillon, "I shall now make it part of my regular business." He did so, but, inasmuch as he aimed at the effect consciously, it lost its spontaneousness and much of its power.

In *Louis the Eleventh*, this performer made some impression, though he failed to give his embodiment the striking individuality of Charles Kean. In his death-scene, however, he showed more dignity than in many of his characters, probably because the influence of death is in itself idealizing.

The present writer is bound to record Mr. Dillon's great success in the little drama entitled "*A Hard Struggle*;" but the impersonation, of the generous yeoman, who surrenders his betrothed to a happier rival, having gained the emphatic praise of Dickens, now published in his *Letters*, may well dispense with any other comment.

In characters of manly pathos that did not call for refinement, Dillon had few superiors. In comedy he showed great animal spirits and a keen sense of fun—as in his performance of the hero of "*The King's Musketeers*," as Rover in "*Wild Oats*," and as Captain Delarousse in Leigh Hunt's spirited piece of intrigue called "*Love's Amazements*." It was a pleasant sight, on the night when the little comedy was produced, to see the venerable essayist and poet led across the stage, amidst the cheers of the audience, and to hear from him afterwards, in the manager's room, how deep was the interest he had felt from his early



days, when he was theatrical critic of the weekly journal called the *News*, in all that concerned the theatre. This success, achieved in his old days, gave artless and unconcealed delight to one who had as keen a zest in receiving the praise of others as he had, when desert permitted, in bestowing his own.

In person, at this time, Dillon was neatly made, but of rather low stature. Though his features were of a common type, his face was capable of great mobility. I have seen it so convulsed by silent grief that, when he at last articulated, I felt the same kind of relief that I might have experienced in real life, when observing speech slowly return to one whom some great shock had deprived of it.

At the close of his management Charles Dillon visited America and Australia. On his return to England his figure had lost much of its grace, and his neck had acquired a thickness which was almost unsightly. He had also greatly declined as an actor. He performed *Manfred* at the Princess's, but with a want of presence and of poetical appreciation that served to heighten my recollection of the unfortunate Denvil, whom I had seen when a lad.

At a later period I saw Mr. Dillon at Drury Lane, once more as *Macbeth*. He still retained some physical energy, but his occasional inspiration had deserted him, while his delivery was become stilted and conventional—in brief, of the worst traditional kind. Something, indeed, of the provincial actor, now seldom found in London, clung to him even in his best days. His happiest efforts were at times marred by his want of bearing, and by the grandiosity which was his

substitution for it. Nor did success, which often educates plastic natures into the refinement they first lack, do much to improve him, either on the stage or in private. I do not think that he can be justly charged with intemperance; but he found a kind of diversion in frequenting bars and tavern parlours, where he would delight to gossip with some trusty officer of his theatre, or some less noted actor of his establishment (for he had sociable and kindly impulses), over sherry and bitters, provided at his own cost. "Simpson's" and the "Albion" knew him, and I think also the "Cock," immortalized by Tennyson.

His merits as an actor engaged the attention of some influential people, but he never appeared to cultivate their acquaintance, which probably he would not have greatly relished. All the same, it pleased him to refer to them as authorities. On one occasion he said, somewhat oddly, for he had no aptitude in catching the ordinary phrases of society, "I am beginning to be a little proud of my Macbeth. Some lords who were talking to me yesterday, spoke very warmly of it."

His evident pleasure in airing his acquaintance with men of position is not so rare a characteristic of English life that we need be severe upon him for it, or impute to him any undue servility. On the contrary, I have seen him behave with praiseworthy ease under trying circumstances. I had occasion to call upon him one morning when he had been a late riser. The street-door of his house being open, and the servant at once ushering me into the breakfast-room, I found him on his knees before the fire, toasting a bloater. "You see what I am doing," he said. "I don't know anything that needs more

careful cooking than a bloater. I'm first-rate at it, and as soon as I've got this fellow off my fork I'll do another for you."

Without any intentional discourtesy, he sometimes trespassed, through want of perception, upon the feelings of others; but, on this being brought home to him, was frankly ready to make atonement. He had altered, and, indeed, mutilated Leigh Hunt's blank verse play, "Love's Amazements," without the consent or even the knowledge of the author. Those portions of the comedy which were in blank verse had especially suffered. When these uncere-monious changes came to the aged poet's knowledge, he protested against them. "He has little knowledge of stage necessities," said Dillon, "and he ought to be obliged to me. As he won't take my advice, I don't think I shall produce the piece." It was pointed out to Dillon that, if he had simply tendered his advice, the dramatist might to some extent have availed himself of it, but that the offence lay in wholesale changes having been made without consulting him. "Oh, then, I see it's a matter of punctilio!" said Dillon, recovering his good temper, and with the air of a man who has suddenly discovered his error and wishes to make reparation. The piece was duly produced. I heard of no further difference between the manager and the poet. I infer that amenities were duly restored.

To the members of his company, Dillon was even a too-indulgent manager. Under no theatrical rule have I seen so much unpunctuality and so many absences at rehearsal, or penalties so light and rare for the transgressions in question. Dillon was good-tempered and

forbearing in cases where some of his profession might have felt reasonably annoyed. One actor in his company, whose ambitious longings had been somewhat harshly blighted, took little pains to conceal his sense of his superiority to his manager. Sometimes his manner was curt and haughty, sometimes ironically polite. In one scene, at the end of an act, Dillon and the performer referred to were together on the stage. If our generally unappreciated friend had been applauded warmly in the scene, he swept by Dillon to his dressing-room in silence, and with an imperious air, as if to say, "At times the public knows who is the better man." When, on the other hand, he met with faint applause, or none, he would stop before leaving the stage, and greet his manager affably. "Poor dear boy!" said Dillon, when relating this; "disappointments like his might embitter any man; and, except for his little crotchet, he's a right good fellow!" which was, I believe, quite true.

There are, of course, many instances of actors who have obtained provincial success establishing themselves permanently as London favourites. Charles Dillon is a rare example of an actor who, having made a decided impression in London, and presided over an important London theatre, relapsed into a provincial celebrity, and was seen in town only at very long intervals. Perhaps this circumstance was due in some measure to his tastes. He probably liked the free-and-easy life, and unceremonious good-comradeship of the roving player. It is said that, in his later days, he would hand over the receipts of a week's performance, to a few actors whom he had engaged, with a primitiveness of

manner and a publicity of circumstance somewhat annoying to them. He would bring, for instance, the money to be shared in a pocket-handkerchief or a newspaper, and appoint the bar of a tavern or the platform of a railway-station for the distribution.

I have no doubt that, after quitting the Lyceum, he sank rapidly into mere staginess. But he merits a record, if for no other reason, because he showed in his best days how far quickness and truth of emotion can carry an actor with little cultivation and a niggardly supply of intellectual gifts. After many inquiries I have been unable to find the precise date of Mr. Dillon's death, but it occurred in the provinces some seven or eight years since, when he was about sixty.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## MR. CHARLES FECHTER.

His Hamlet, with remarks on a familiar and realistic style in tragic acting—His Othello—His Iago—"Macready his banner"—This assertion to be received with limitations—Fechter's admitted excellence in refined melodrama—His death in America.

I HAD but a slight acquaintance with Mr. Fechter, and my knowledge of him as an actor was very limited. I saw, however, his Hamlet, his Othello, and his Iago, and differ only from his critics in general in less admiring him in the first of the characters, and more in the last. There was, indeed, a great deal to interest and please in his novel treatment of Hamlet. His aim here was to be realistic; and as the mood of the Danish prince is so often colloquial, Fechter's familiar treatment was often appropriate, especially as he had enough good taste and delicate fancy not to carry it too far. On the other hand, he was deficient in passion and in the imaginativeness which it kindles. He had sentiment, intelligence, picturesqueness, and that conformity to the manner of actual life which many call nature, but which generally ceases to be nature when great passions have to be exhibited, because, even if ordinary men had the power to express them, the restraint of modern habits tends to their

repression, rather than to their representation. We cannot, perhaps, too often remember that the actor of passions has to display the very soul of the character; whereas, the actor of sentiment and comedy has but to display the fit conjunction of feelings with the manners of the time. Thus, there is no real *Ædipus* or *Clytemnestra*, no real *Lear*, *Othello*, and, in many passages, no real *Hamlet*, in the sense of individualities upon whom the habits of any particular time can be fitly imposed. To a certain extent, these creations represent men with particular dispositions, no doubt; but still more do they represent general humanity in its essentials. Of these, poetry is the natural language, because it is, and always has been, that of the highest grandeur and emotion. Indeed, unless this were so, poetry, in any high sense, would have no reason for being, and would be only a capricious fashion. Do we not come to imagination for the expression of our deepest feelings, simply because *we must*—because we are driven to seek for fresh and vivid symbols for what is so vital within us? In short, Mr. Fechter, spite of the novelty of his appearance—he wore flaxen hair—his ease and moderation, in a word, his modernness, did not satisfy me. These qualities should have accompanied others yet higher. There were several fine, and even poetical touches in his performance, as when, in the closet-scene, he mutely repelled the embraces of the guilty queen by simply holding up his father's portrait. On the whole, I was greatly pleased, but not carried away. It was, perhaps, something to see a *Hamlet* who might have trodden Pall Mall or the Boulevards in our own day. Yet it was to lose much that this impres-



sion should have been more vivid than that of the Hamlet who encounters the ghost at midnight, or who throws himself, with half-delirious triumph, into Horatio's arms, when the King's "occulted guilt" betrays itself in the play-scene.

As to his Othello, little can be said. It was virtually pronounced a failure by the best critics, and there seems to be no reason for questioning their verdict. It was thin, excitable, sensitive, and impatient, without having the strength or glow of true passion. Moreover, Mr. Fechter made the mistake of playing some of the greatest scenes of the tragedy in the open air. Even had the representation been really powerful, the audience would have been diverted from it by a view embracing the incidents of the Cyprian sea-port. The representations of great tragic scenes appear to demand a simple interior for their due effect. The eye, as well as the thought, should be concentrated upon the actor; there should be no world beyond the four walls which enclose him into which the attention of the spectator can wander and lose itself. One passage in the last act was fine and thrilling. It is where, after Iago's villainy has been exposed, Othello turns in remorse to the body of his wife—

"Oh, Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!"

In uttering the second exclamation, there was a mingling of wild remonstrance with Othello's agony, as if he had not believed her dead, but expected her to answer.

If Fechter disappointed in Othello, he surpassed expectation in Iago. While duly indicating his malignity towards the Moor, he seldom *looked* the villain; and, besides the

motive of revenge, he had that of intellectual enjoyment in his work; he was pleased and amused by the sense of his superiority to his puppets, and the ease with which he played on them. His Iago was, on the whole, gay, agreeable, and ingratiating. In specious good-comradeship, it almost equalled Vandenhoff's, which has been already mentioned. In adapting itself to the various characters of the play, it approached Macready's.

Calling upon Mr. Fechter one morning, at the theatre, he talked much of the distinguished actor just named. "Macready," he repeatedly exclaimed—"Macready is my banner!"—a profession of faith which was, no doubt, very grateful to Dickens, John Foster, and other friends of the retired tragedian. And there was truth in the assertion. He had the familiar, the colloquial side of Macready; but this, with sentiment and refinement, formed his stock-in-trade. He wanted Macready's exaltation in passion, and thus his power of contrasting it with familiar touches which added to its reality without lessening its dignity. There was something, in a word, Homeric in Macready's realism; it gave the force of truthful, simple detail to passion, but was not the substitute for it, nor its principal feature. Fechter was, however, a remarkable actor in what may be called refined melodrama. He greatly distinguished himself in "Ruy Blas," in "The Corsican Brothers," "The Duke's Motto," and as Obenrezer in the "No Thoroughfare" of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. He died in America, in 1879, aged fifty-seven.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## MR. EDWARD ASKEW SOTHERN.

His humour special to himself—In comedy resembles Charles Mathews—Difference between them—Sothorn's limited, but real power in sentiment and sarcasm—One secret of his humour, his sense of the ridiculous in the unexpected—Illustrations of this in his Lord Dundreary, and to some extent in his David Garrick—His acting in that character—His desire to perform in tragedy—Difficulties in his way—Also in that of Robson—Sothorn excelled in characters of spirit, rather than of sentiment—His acting in "A Hero of Romance"—Fails in characters chiefly pathetic, as in the hero of Mr. Tom Taylor's "Lesson for Life"—Successful, however, in touches of abrupt pathos, where it contrasts other qualities—Author's obligations to him in the comedy of "A Favourite of Fortune"—Description of his acting in this piece—His emotional susceptibility—Peculiarity of his mind in relation to the romantic—His passion for external reality—The *chaise à deux*—Tempted to overdo his efforts—Examples from his later performances of Dundreary—His desire to appear in a play which should combine opportunities for power and pathos with openings for his peculiar humour—Author accedes to his request—His generous estimate of the play written, and his subsequent hesitations respecting it—Desires a part which should prepare, by gradual transitions, for his appearance in tragedy—Difficulties in the way—Vacillation of his mind—Desires a modern version of "David Garrick" to alternate with that piece—Charm of his manner—Personal appearance—The *fortiter in re*—Sothorn in society—His power of retort when offended—An example—His love of hunting and horses—His animal vitality—His delight in practical jokes—Instances of this—His lingering illness and death—Mr. Lytton Sothorn.

IN broad or eccentric characters, Mr. Sothern's humour was peculiar to himself. In refined comedy, his manner, albeit less airy than that of the younger Mathews, was not dissimilar. Moreover, in his power in the direction of sentiment, though special and very limited, he differed from his brother-comedian, in whom it scarcely existed. Sothern, though somewhat heavy in serious delivery, could be earnest and telling in sarcasm, and I have known him, on one or two occasions, surprise the house by a touch of pathos, all the more telling from contrast with his reckless levity. But in his peculiarity as an eccentric humorist he had no rival in his own day—no successful competitor. Whether by design or by instinct, he was complete master of all that is most irresistible in the unexpected. If, as in *Lord Dundreary*, the character he assumed was half-idiotic, he would deliver its absurdities with an air of profound sagacity, and now and then relieve them by a sharp thrust of shrewd common sense. If his mistakes were ridiculous and farcical, as when he stumbled into the lap of an old dowager, the confusion which the mistake occasioned him, and his air of well-bred contrition, half-redeemed him in one's opinion.

In *Lord Dundreary*, the elaborateness of his calculation, compared with the absurdity of his conclusions; his irrelevant answer, again, "Yes, it is foggy!" to the sentimental Georgiana, who has pursued a love-dialogue until she is on tip-toe for a proposal; the deliberation with which he lays siege to the problem of the brothers who were changed at nurse, and the dense perplexity with which he becomes involved as the

question envelops him with its bewildering difficulties,—these instances may exemplify that odd juxtaposition of what was comical in spirit and serious in manner, in which he excelled. His Lord Dundreary and Brother Sam, and his acting in “Dundreary Married and Settled,” gave him frequent opportunities for the kind of effect I have described. To some extent there were similar opportunities in his David Garrick; but in this case there was necessarily, too, a touch of the extravagant and the mock-heroic, the reverse and burlesque side of the tragic tapestry. “Farce”—is it Coleridge who says so? —“is far more closely related to tragedy than comedy is.” It deals, in fact, with terror and suffering—with predicaments, in a word, which are not the less intense because they have their origin in the absurd.

In his early performances in David Garrick—especially the scenes in which he attempts to disenchant the citizen’s daughter by assuming the excesses of a drunkard—Mr. Sothorn was droll and effective, without being overstrained, and there was real feeling in his sense of the humiliation he inflicts upon himself to save the girl who loves him from a misplaced passion. His declamation of some tragic lines, though a little heightened for the special occasion, was so fervent, that it might have been effective if his acting had been in earnest. More than once, when he expressed his besetting desire to play tragedy, and his fear that, after Lord Dundreary, the public would not accept him, “Deliver tragedy,” I said, “as you do in David Garrick, only omit the touch of burlesque, and you may succeed.” “Ah! but

it is just because in David Garrick it is burlesque," he replied, "that I dare let myself go." This reply seemed to me to light up the entire position.

Sothorn, and, in a far greater degree, Robson, could each, in farce and prose drama, give one the impression that he might succeed as a poetical tragedian; but, in poetic tragedy, the sense each actor had of something absurd in flights of imagination and passion would have been so strong as to disqualify him, while in burlesque they both felt that they could give the rein to their impulses, and that the laughter it provoked would indicate their success. To conceive and express passion, in short, the actor must be able to trust and to express the depths of feeling in his own heart, and to rely upon it as an abiding truth; while the mere manners of the time, to which passion seems often opposed, are only superficial. Nevertheless, in parts where spirit rather than depth of passion was required, and the former quality sprang rather from the situation than from the individuality of character, Sothorn was seen to considerable advantage.

In "The Hero of Romance," adapted from "Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre," his ease and gentlemanly bearing made him acceptable in a part which, though relieved by touches of humour, was mainly serious. In the critical situation where, to rebut the heroine's charge of having intentionally compromised her, he leaped from the tower at the imminent risk of life, the excitement of the situation stirred him, and there was a union of vigour and passion in his acting which carried away the house.

In characters where the situations were chiefly

pathetic, he scarcely succeeded so well. Thus, in Mr. Tom Taylor's play, entitled "A Lesson for Life," he was, on the whole, heavy and unimpressive, and in delivery he doled out his syllables with a slowness of intonation which failed to convey genuine feeling. On the other hand, where the pathos to be expressed was abrupt and relieved by contrast with other qualities, such as anger or sarcasm, I have known him admirably effective. I had the good fortune to profit by his acting in a position of this kind. In the third act of "The Favourite of Fortune," the hero is under the belief that the girl who had accepted him, and whom he warmly loved, is at length forsaking him on account of a sudden bad turn in his fortunes. Suppressing his first bitter disappointment, the actor at length assumed a vein of gaiety, in which he complimented her upon her prudence, upon her "love with its eyes open"—all this with a gay and easy, though rather heightened and rapid utterance, till at last, feeling the strain to rule his feelings too much for him, he suddenly took leave of the lady. Interrupting himself, "Good morning!" he cried, beginning with a tone of light, airy indifference, and ending with a faltering attempt to choke his emotion, while the rigid lines of his face relaxed into grief as he hurried from the stage, and the hushed audience broke into a storm of applause. "How did you manage that effect, Sothorn?" I asked. "It managed itself," answered the actor, whom many looked upon as a mere exponent of the fantastic and absurd. "By the time I came to 'Good morning!' tears almost blinded me. A spasm in my throat nearly choked my voice," he continued—translating, probably not con-



sciously, "Vox faucibus hæsit"—"and I had to struggle for a light, unconcerned articulation, just as a proud, suffering man might have to do in real life."

In the following act, where he treats the explanation of the girl he loved, first with irony, then with an explosion of indignation at her seeming worldliness, he was no less excellent. He could delineate both pathos and passion, when they were sufficiently relieved by the sang-froid and the polished bitterness of the man of society. The elements of scepticism and of truth to modern manners probably seemed to justify to his mind (which, strangely, at once delighted in the romantic, and yet felt shy of it, as unreal) the presence of passion. Passion, however true, if not interwoven with the outward actualities of existing life, he might have found extravagant and absurd, simply because infrequent. He loved a touch of reality, however superficial, from the bottom of his heart. In the comedy I have referred to, he hears that he has had a dangerous rival, a rich fellow called Gresham. "Gresham!" the actor had to exclaim, in soliloquy; "I should like to know Gresham." Very simple words; but the uneasy laugh, latent jealousy, and suppressed menace with which they were given, called forth a hearty response.

Sothorn's passion for what I may call external reality was carried so far that he caused a *chaise à deux*—then quite a novelty—to be introduced for the most pathetic scene in the play. His wish was that he and the lady of his affection should occupy the two seats of this lounge; that here her apparent treachery to him and his struggles against the heavy blow should be represented.

From this proposal I was obliged strongly to dissent. The notion of a love-distress taking place while the two interlocutors were seated uncomfortably close to each other, like Darby and Joan, on a pillion, would have seemed to me itself ridiculous, even if the peculiar construction of the seats had not heightened the comical effect by setting the lovers almost back to back to each other. Besides this, there was the novelty of the piece of furniture, which would have had the effect of all such trifling novelties—of diverting the attention from the reality of human feeling to a mere accidental reality of the scene. A debate ensued on the part in question, in which I was glad, both for the piece and for my chief actor, to find him at length a convert to my opinion.

Sothorn did not sufficiently guard against the temptation of overdoing the points in which he had been successful. Accordingly, in his later performances, passages in his Dundreary and David Garrick, which at first had ease and freshness of humour, became forced and somewhat tedious, while what is called the "business" of the part underwent similar exaggeration. The business, for instance, which he at last introduced, of arranging half a dozen candles on a dressing-table, blowing some of them out, and puzzling himself as to the number of candles—I think that was the riddle, but I am not quite sure of my memory—was inadmissible even in farce, and was probably only tolerated on account of better things in the performance and the actor's established popularity.

Mr. Sothorn's desire to venture on tragic characters, which haunted him for the greater part

of his career, has already been mentioned. I had many applications from him to write a play which should give him the chance of combining power and pathos with the humours and gaieties of a social favourite. As to one drama in which I consulted his wishes in this respect, he expressed himself with generous enthusiasm; and one would have supposed that the piece would have been at once put into rehearsal at the Haymarket, where, at the time, he was practically lord paramount. But his "hue of resolution," like Hamlet's, "was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." At last we arranged an interview upon the subject of the new piece. "I have been thinking of my part," he began, "and you know how much I like it; but I shall probably break my neck if I take a leap from a character of the Lord Dundreary type to one so tragic as this." "You don't mean," I asked, "that you have given up the idea of performing it?" "Not in the least; but before doing so, I must appear in a kind of half-way character, to reconcile the audience to the change." We then discussed the possibilities of providing such a part as he required. Various subjects were proposed, but all presented a formidable difficulty. If the play were of serious interest, the leading character, in affording scope for Mr. Sothorn's eccentric powers, would risk his hold on the audience; while, on the other hand, in the development of a humorous or eccentric character, tragic sentiment and position would be still more dangerous. The nearest approximation placed on the actual stage to the character desired was "The Hero of Romance," already adverted to, in which the principal character

was one of sentimental comedy. Later, he took a fancy to an original piece of mine which he thought solved the old difficulty, and would be a fit introduction to the yet more passionate character which he had in reserve, and in which he still longed to appear. In neither of these pieces, however, did he ever perform, probably because, as year by year passed by with Lord Dundreary still his leading card, he began to regard his acceptance by the public in a tragic part as hopeless, or because long absence from England and declining health had weakened his desire for new enterprise.

The difficulty of finding him constant to any particular design was, I believe, an experience which I shared with many other dramatists. My one consolation was, that as it was not my practice to part absolutely with the acting right of my pieces, they all in due time, with one exception, reverted to me. The exception was a play which, after some demur, I rather unwisely consented to write on a subject akin to that of "David Garrick," placing the action in our own day. The fancy of appearing one night as the real David Garrick, and in the dress of that actor's time, and the next night as a comedian of to-day, with the latest nonchalant and *nil admirari* style of a club *habitué*, had a singular attraction for him. "I shall play the two pieces so often," he said, with the sanguine gaiety which, at times, contrasted with his morbid caution, "that your piece will be an annuity to you." Though it was at once easy to understand that little reputation could be gained by a work, even if successful, which was to be for the most part a duplicate of another, such was his earnestness, and such

generally the persuasive charm of his manner, that I yielded to the request. On the completion of the piece he expressed himself with his usual generous appreciation; but, from one cause or another, it was never produced.

In private, as has just been hinted, the manners of the popular comedian were pleasing to the point of captivation. Rather tall and of a shapely, well-knit figure, he possessed also a handsome face. Though the features were not very mobile, the eyes were expressive, and the smile was winning. He had the ease of a man conversant with the best society, and often an engaging frankness of manner which seemed to imply that he took his interlocutor into his special confidence. Notwithstanding this amiability, it was understood that few possessed a fuller share of the *fortiter in re* than Sothorn. I have heard him say to an *employé* of the Haymarket, where he was then practically dictator, "Go at once to Miss——. Be sure to see her either to-night or early in the morning. Tell her when we have made an offer, we do not reconsider our terms, and that the case does not admit of delay, and that if to-morrow she hesitates to accept our proposals, we shall consider them withdrawn."

In society, too, he could, on a real or seeming provocation, show the sharp claw through the velvet paw. On one occasion, when introduced to a man who was believed, like Congreve, to value himself upon his social position, as much as upon literary celebrity, precautions had been taken, it appeared, to find that the introduction would be acceptable. The surprise and disappointment of the introducer were therefore great

when he found that Sothern's pleasant advances were received with an air of chilling reserve. There is reason to believe that the demeanour was due rather to habit than to intention. Unfortunately, it did not seem so to the comedian, who was on the most familiar terms with what is accepted as the best society. To cover the awkwardness, the host remarked, "We must persuade Mr. A—— to give us a drama for the stage." "Exactly!" cried Sothern, seizing his opportunity, and continuing to this effect: "If it should be my lot to play in it, I should like him to show that I do not greatly care for having the sympathy of the audience; I should greatly like to play one of those disagreeable pretenders who are not the less ill-bred because they have some little position, which they think entitles them to be uncourteous and arrogant. He wouldn't be a pleasant personage, of course; but there's a great deal in having a character true to life." After this relief of his indignation, he passed on, and no further allusion was made to the incident.

Horses and hunting seemed to share Sothern's affections with grotesque humour in his art and practical fun out of it. In his dressing-room, the discussion of important theatrical business would be often interrupted by overtures for the purchase or sale of some equine fancy, or by speculation on the chances of a favourite. Full of animal vitality when I first knew him, his very recreations were arduous. I well remember a protracted game at battledore and shuttlecock on his lawn one broiling summer day, which, while it left those engaged in it half dead with fatigue, seemed to produce in him only

freshness and exhilaration. I suspect part of his enjoyment lay in the fun of exhibiting his panting and exhausted associates to the onlooking guests, who had wisely declined to be enlisted in this boisterous game.

His delight in practical jokes was for a season or two a London topic. Rumours of the mishaps that had befallen friends who had slept under his roof, of mysterious and ghostly noises and appearances, of summonses to wake at untimely hours, and sudden discharges of concealed shower-baths on the heads of reluctant risers—these, with stories of surprised victims, whose identity he affected to mistake, and who tried to extricate themselves from the responsibilities of other men, furnished mirth for a large circle. Even if at times exaggerated and untrue, at least, these relations pointed to a truth, and had their source in reality. One of the best anecdotes of him is that which tells of a visit to a furnishing undertaker, from whom he ordered, on a most elaborate scale, all that was necessary for a funeral. Before the preparations could have gone far he reappeared, with great solicitude, to ask how they were progressing. Again, at a brief interval, he presented himself, with an anxious face, to inquire when he could count upon possession of the body—a question which naturally amazed the undertaker, who was at a loss to discover his meaning. “Of course you provide the body,” said Sothern, coming to his enlightenment. “The body!” stammered the bewildered respondent. “Why, do you not say,” exclaimed the actor, exhibiting a card of the shop, “‘all things necessary for funerals amply supplied’? Is not a body the very first neces-



sity?" I do not vouch from personal knowledge for the truth of this grim joke, though I have heard it repeatedly, and have no reason to doubt its accuracy. It bears, at all events, the trace of Sothorn's peculiar humour, which loved to bring the grave and grotesque into startling juxtaposition. That he had great and various merits as an actor has already been indicated. The kind of humour just adverted to was however his most special feature.

A lingering illness at length dimmed the glow of this mercurial spirit. For some time before his death, which took place early in 1881, Mr. Sothorn had practically withdrawn from the stage.

In representing his father's characters, the late Mr. Lytton Sothorn, who died in 1887, gave some impression of his manner, though the essentials of a man's individuality are more subtle than his mechanical forms, and more liable to escape. However, Mr. Lytton Sothorn had some independent claims on public attention.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MISS LILIAN ADELAIDE NEILSON.

Her recitations at St. George's Hall—Previous appearance in "The Huguenot Captain" at the Princess's, and at the Royalty—Gives little promise at the Princess's of her future celebrity—Her personal appearance—Her way of taking the audience into her confidence—Her recitations at St. George's Hall described—"The May Queen"—Her power in the mysterious and supernatural—"Lady Clare"—A letter expressing the author's gratification sent by a friend to Miss Neilson—She writes to the author from Stoke Bruerne Rectory, requesting permission to call on him—Interview with Miss Neilson (Mrs. Philip Lee) and her husband—Her winning manners—Her extreme interest in trifles, yet keen insight into theatrical and dramatic art—Her performance of Juliet at the Princess's—She and her husband visit Etretât in Normandy, where the writer and family were staying—Her recitations in private—Hood's "Haunted House"—Her recitations hitherto more striking than her acting—Reasons for this—A remedy suggested in a new mode of study—She appears at the Casino at Etretât, for the benefit of the poor, and recites a lyric by Sydney Dobell—Her absorption in her studies contrasted with her madcap frolics—Examples of the latter—Her wonderful vitality one cause of her success as an actress—Appears at the Gaiety Theatre—Her readings from British and foreign dramatists at St. James's Hall—Her excellence in recitations from "Phèdre," and in the character of Miss Prue—The framework of these readings from the pen of Mr. Joseph Knight—She appears as the heroine of the writer's play, "Life for Life," at the Lyceum Theatre—Her acting in this play—Gradual development of her powers—Her lingering faults—They are eventually overcome—Mr. Hermann Vezin in "Life for Life"—Miss Neilson's Amy Robsart at

Drury Lane—Her growing popularity—She appears as Juliet for her benefit—Striking advance upon her early performances of the character—Her Juliet minutely described—Her Rosalind, Viola, Lady Teazle, Julia in "The Hunchback"—The last character modernized, as if for the drawing-room—The manifestations of imaginative passion are similar in all periods—No successful compromise possible between imagination and superficial realism—Miss Neilson's great performance of Isabella in "Measure for Measure"—A visit to Stoke Bruerne—Miss Neilson at home—The life of her circle—Her parentage alleged to have been obscure, but her manners already those of society—She reads the "May Queen" to a clerical audience—Their emotion at certain lines—Her splendid reading in private of "The Charge of the Light Brigade"—The writer gradually loses sight of her—Her sudden death in Paris.

AMONGST the times which stand out vividly in my past is the evening—I think in 1866—when Miss Lilian Neilson gave scenes and recitations in St. George's Hall. I had previously seen her play a character of no great importance in "The Huguenot Captain," a drama produced at the Princess's Theatre. She had before this performed at the Royalty, but it was at the Princess's that she first appeared in a large theatre—at all events, in London. In spite of her attractive and expressive face, she made no particular effect in her small part. Her acting, probably owing to nervousness, was constrained and even awkward, while her voice was indistinct and monotonous. It was therefore with little expectation of pleasure that, at the earnest request of a friend, I presented myself at St. George's Hall on the occasion aforesaid. Having a stall near the platform, I had a good opportunity of estimating her qualifications as an actress. She had a face lit up by brilliant eyes, the dark pupils of

which shone out in effective contrast with the clear white in which they were set. Her features were scarcely regular; she had a too prominent chin, nor was her nose particularly well formed, but her complexion was clear and *mate*. One of the earliest points to impress the spectator was her winning manner towards the audience. Her method of taking them into her sympathy by a mute appeal, or a smile, or a gesture, was retained to the end of her career and became at last a little too obvious for that true art which demands that an exponent of character shall be lost in the part assumed. At this time, however, especially in recitation, the confidence with the audience rather enhanced the effect. When reading "The May Queen," for instance, as she glanced brightly round the house after the refrain—

"I'm to be Queen of the May, mother, I'm to be Queen of the May!"

there was a tacit invitation to the listener to share the young girl's delight and pride; and when, in the sequel, the gloom of lingering illness deepens into that of the "valley of the shadow," there were moments when the reciter turned to us with a look of sympathetic commentary, as much as to say, "Oh, now hope is fading away from the young girl; now she takes leave of those she loves; now she grows calm and pacified for the end!" And when, towards the close, the bright eyes of the speaker filled with tears which she scarcely tried to repress, her personal sensibility to the pathos of the story was almost as touching as the story itself. Of course, many performers besides Miss Neilson have taken their

listeners into their confidence, but I have rarely seen one who so successfully as she disengaged herself for the moment from the situation she was representing, to play or to speak chorus to her own exposition, and to increase the sympathy of the audience by showing its effects upon herself. As to the general merits of the recitation, they included great archness and spirit in the first part, great tenderness in the second, and, above all, signal power in bringing out the imaginative beauties of the poem.

The passage in which the dying girl fancies that the angels call her was given with a display of bodily feebleness, joined to great exaltation of feeling, that suggested well how one on the frontier of another life might see signs and revelations hidden from the unpurged sight of those for whom the world is yet a dwelling-place. Her capacity to impress you with the mysterious and the supernatural—a rare accomplishment—was with her spontaneous. Her voice, on the whole, was adapted equally to utterances of mirth or sadness. At times, however, not often, in love passages, it had a little forced sweetness; it was saccharine and cloying. Again, in grave dialogue it had a passing trick of becoming unnecessarily hollow and sepulchral. Both these faults of intonation, however, were exceptional.

I forget the general programme of the readings at which I assisted. It included, however, Tennyson's "Lady Clare," which she gave with great spirit and variety. No recitation, however, so surprised and moved me as "The May Queen." A few lines of gratification addressed to the friend who had requested my presence were, it

appears, sent by him to Miss Neilson. A few days later a letter, dated "Stoke Bruerne Rectory, Northamptonshire," was received by the present narrator, stating the wish of Miss Neilson and her husband to call on their next visit to town. A meeting took place. The manners of the actress, which were distinguished by child-like frankness and impulsiveness, were peculiarly winning, while her keen appreciation and intelligence, when any question of dramatic art was touched upon, contrasted curiously with the interest she evinced in the merest trifles of gossip.\*

Soon after our first interview I saw Miss Neilson in the character of Juliet, which she performed for a few nights at the Princess's Theatre. It was a respectable performance. It had conventional adequacy, and the usual effects of the part were so far realized as to satisfy the audience. But I missed the fresh impulse, the unstrained pathos which had been shown in her recitations.

In the summer of the same year in which we met Miss Neilson in London, she and her husband visited Etretât, on the coast of Normandy, where the writer and his family were staying. Sometimes, at sunset, the actress would give up the mild distractions of the *Établissement*, and join us at a little cottage which we had hired for the season. There, with a croquet-box for her pedestal, and two candles on either hand, she would indulge us with her favourite recitations. Amongst these

\* She had been married shortly before this time to the son of the Rev. Philip Lee, Rector of Stoke Bruerne, Northamptonshire.

was Hood's powerful poem, "The Haunted House," in which her power in the weird and mysterious was signally exhibited. After a little cross-examination, she managed to elicit my preference for her recitations to her acting on the stage. She had been carefully and ably instructed for the latter, but her anxious attention to rules, together with the importance of such a part as Juliet, had cramped her efforts. "I take much more pains for the stage than for short recitals," she said, with a look of disappointment. I ventured to suggest that the pains she took prevented full success; that in her readings she abandoned herself freely to her own impulses, and forgot rules, which, valuable if once sufficiently mastered, are only impediments when one is too conscious of them. She seemed to think there was some truth in the remark, and when I begged her—discarding for the time all she had learned—to re-read Juliet or Rosalind, as if for the first time, and let each character speak to her for itself, she heartily approved this counsel, and lost no time in following it. Some days later she would fly into our little salon, charged with passages for recitation. I advised her to put the sense of some of the most poetic passages into prose, and to imagine analogous situations to those of the poet in modern life, that so she might get freshly at the essential meaning of both words and positions, assuring her that all the charm of poetic rhythm would come back to her when she reverted to the original text. She complimented me by saying that these suggestions were of use to her. She had, however, a power of assimilating and expanding any hint which was far more valuable than the hint itself.



During this visit Miss Neilson took part in an entertainment at the Casino for the benefit of the poor. She recited, amongst other things, with great effect, the lyric by that poets' poet, my late friend, Sydney Dobell—

“Oh, a gallant *sans peur*  
Is the merry *chasseur*.”

The English contingent on the occasion was small, but her eloquence of look and gesture delighted even those who could not follow her words. In the meantime she exhibited, in seeming contrast with occasional absorption in her art, a vein of wild frolic which gave to common pastimes almost serious excitement. Were a game of croquet going on in the *Passée*, you would hear a sound like the lowing of a cow; she would suddenly appear on the bank of the adjoining field, part the screening shrubs, with a shout of laughter, and leap down impetuously to seize a mallet. Or, having secured a private billiard-table at the hotel, she would insist upon enlisting you to witness her exploits, even if you did not engage in the game, at which she was tolerably expert. A stroke at once difficult and successful would cause her as much delight as the plaudits of the theatre. A fine stroke that narrowly missed success would draw from her a lamentation so tragic, that the accompaniment of tears would not have surprised you. She would brood over fortunes, as revealed by cards, with a look of intensity, as if instant life and death had been at stake. Again, on a wild impulse, she would follow the *blanchisseuse* to the hotel-landing, seize the towels which she had just laid there, and pelt them after her to

the woman's amazement and her own delight. One of her amusements was to purchase the entire stock-in-trade of the man on the beach who sold "gauffres," or "plaisirs," as they are termed in France, and scatter them, while her eyes swam in tears of laughter, amongst a crowd of excited, scrambling children. "In seeming contrast to her absorption in her art," has been written of these freaks; yet to that overflowing vitality from which they sprang were most likely due some of her triumphs on the stage. Passionate sympathy with emotion was the key to them. With an intellect yet deeper, and, above all, calmer, she would have been an actress of the highest imagination, for she would have been able to realize her conceptions habitually in those forms in which, in living sculpture, they stand symbolized to the eye. Even as it was, she now and then reached this excellence. At other times she trusted, and not vainly, for her impressiveness to her intensity of feeling and delivery.

On her return to England she fulfilled a not very important engagement at the Gaiety. Her readings at St. James's Hall, however, proved a great success with her audience, and with critics who could speak with authority. Those readings embraced translations from some of the most admired dramatists of Europe. Amongst other works drawn upon, were "The Two Piccolomini" of Schiller, and the "Phèdre" of Racine. The extract from the latter included the memorable soliloquy in the fourth act, in which Phèdre, stricken with her guilty love, apostrophizes the shade of her father, Minos. I had witnessed the acting of Rachel in the same scene, and was

disposed, on the whole, to rank it as the highest piece of acting in classical tragedy I could recall. I could see Miss Neilson's rendering, however, not only without disappointment, but with lively admiration. She could not, indeed, equal Rachel's wonderful combination of sculpturesque dignity with intense emotion, but she recalled Rachel herself, whom, of course, she was too young to have seen, in depicting the awful recoil of Minos when Phèdre shall appear at his bar, and in expressing the exhausting torture of the struggle between conscience and love.

She won a success no less original in a weeded version of Congreve's "Miss Prue." Her own delight in frolic, even to mischief, here found its vent. For the time being, Miss Neilson was Miss Prue. The framework of these readings, it should be said, was admirable alike for its wise choice of examples and for its clear and eloquent expositions. It was due to the pen of Mr. Joseph Knight, since so well known in theatrical criticism and general literature, and received warm tributes from the press in general, including the *Times* and the *Athenæum*.

During her visit to Etretât, Miss Neilson repeatedly asked me to write a play for her. Having given her the outline of one which had occupied my thoughts for some time, an arrangement was concluded; the play was written in the autumn, and produced the following spring at the Lyceum Theatre, under the title of "Life for Life." Her acting in the piece, though excepted to by some critics, gained warm approval from others, while the general fervour of her delivery, her awe-struck rendering of certain incidents of a ghostly Scottish legend, the ardour of her

love, and her passionate defiance of threatened death when urged to renounce it, never failed to move her audience. At times a want of variety in her expression of passion showed that she had something to acquire. The terrible calm irony in which passion at times seeks relief from invective she had yet to master. In rage she employed at this time only invective. Experience ere long gave a wider range of power; but, even at the time now spoken of, the genuineness of her feeling atoned with the public for every drawback. A serious one has yet to be mentioned. She could be excellent both in tragedy and comedy, but she had not yet learned the power of fusing the gay and grave aspects of a character into the same individuality. In her changes of mood she seemed suddenly to drop one character and to assume another. Of course, long before the end of her career, she acquired the requisite flexibility of style and the power of blending opposite qualities. While touching briefly on her performance of "Life for Life," I may mention that Mr. Herbert Vezin supported one of the most important characters. Allowing for the limits within which the writer had confined him, this fine actor was never seen, perhaps, to greater advantage, except in his admirable impersonation of "The Man o' Airlie."

At the end of Miss Neilson's engagement at the Lyceum, "Life for Life" was transferred to the Adelphi Theatre. In the course of a few months she accepted an engagement at Drury Lane, in which she appeared as Amy Robsart in the late Mr. Halliday's adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's "Kenilworth." The character, as abridged

in the drama, was a little beneath her powers, but her devotion to Leicester and her childlike admiration of him, no less than her scorn of Varney, were very telling. The piece was well got up, and, having a *dénouement* in which Varney, not Amy, becomes the victim of his villainous scheme, was very successful, and established the growing popularity of the actress. A far more important event, however, was her appearance in Juliet—I think, for her benefit. A very different performance was it from that at the Princess's, a year or two before. Miss Neilson no longer played the part according to mere rules, however good, but from her own quick perception and sympathy. The sudden overclouding of her love, even in the first act, was full of sinister omen. At the lines—

“My only love sprung from my only hate!  
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!”

her bending eagerness in inquiring as to Romeo's identity was suddenly exchanged for an erect and arrested attitude, while her look seemed to realize the tragic “future in the instant.” The same dark presentiment was powerfully expressed in the balcony-scene. The injunction—

“Oh, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon!”

was no mere raillery, as it is with some actresses, but a superstitious misgiving; and the lines—

“I have no joy of this contract to-night;  
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be,  
Ere one can say—It lightens!”

were given with all the conviction and settled melancholy of a prophecy. You saw it was for

her lover's sake, rather than her own, that Juliet rallied herself in saying—

“Sweet, good night !  
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,  
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.”

In the entire scene, the love of Juliet flowed forth with unusual impulsiveness, but remained virginal and fresh through the guilelessness of the utterance. Miss Neilson's subsequent coaxing of the Nurse for her news had many admirers, but it seemed to me that the cajolery was overdone, and savoured rather of the arts of a practised intriguer than those of an innocent and affectionate girl. When the tragedy commences, and Juliet hears that Romeo has slain her kinsman, the actress found one of those great openings for passion which she seldom failed to seize. Her rebuke called forth by the Nurse's malediction on Romeo was like a sudden blaze of lightning. Admirable was her mode of struggling through her perplexity to the comfort that, though Tybalt was dead, her husband still lived, and that, however, some half apprehended terror still remained—

“Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death,  
That murdered me : . . .  
*Tybalt is dead, and Romeo—banished ;*  
That *banished*, that one word—*banished*,  
Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts !”

The frantic despair, the fierce recklessness of fate, as if it had no power to do worse, spoke alike in look, tone, and gesture, as she swept across the stage. In the parting of the lovers, Miss Neilson was, to my thinking, less admirable. The intensity of grief seemed a little artificial, the love over-elaborate and wanting in the

directness of true passion. Either on this occasion, however, or later, she gave a telling close to the scene. As Romeo disappeared, her extended arms followed him awhile, with a desperate effort, as if her soul still pursued him; then the arms relaxed and hung supine, she turned mechanically, and lay unconscious; life had fled with him. Few points in the character were more striking than Miss Neilson's "Amen" to the heartless advice of her nurse, that she should forget her lover and make herself happy with Paris. There was a depth of irony in her tone, a sense of utter estrangement in her averted looks, as of one who has aspired and believed in vain, and who has no further commerce with the world. Her resolution, when with the Friar, to take the trance-bringing potion was admirable in its quiet intensity. There was a momentary shudder, indeed, as she listened to his ghastly description of the counterfeited death which should follow; but, on the whole, her bearing was hushed and stern. Extremes meet, and the fixed absorption of Juliet in one idea had in its still settled purpose something that resembled apathy. One thing was to be done, one end, if possible, to be accomplished; violence of emotion or manner would have seemed shallow compared with her inflexible calm. It was, however, in the chamber-scene that the crowning triumph was reached. Things not to be forgotten were her deep, lingering farewell as Lady Capulet retired, contrasted with the forced lightness which had been assumed in her presence, the passing thought to call back her mother and the Nurse, with the bitter comment as she stifled it, "What should *she* do here?" the hushed



and growing terror as the possible effects of the potion begin to crowd upon her mind, till she pictures herself waking in the charnel-house—

“Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,  
Lies festering in his shroud.”

No mere report can convey the freezing horror with which she swung round, as on a pivot, with hands screening her eyes, as if recoiling from the sight, which yet fascinated her, of Tybalt's imagined shape behind her. But perhaps the noblest feature of this powerful scene was her exaltation when, at last rallying herself, she raised the phial to her lips, as if pledging her lover with the apostrophe—

“Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here's drink—I drink to thee!”

It was the triumph of love over all the dread environments of imagination—the poetry of devotion realized to the eye.

In later years the actress discarded this fine close of her soliloquy in favour of a more stagey ending. Her passion, too, in the balcony-scene had lost something of its guilelessness; it was a somewhat forced and full-blown flower. To the last, however, her Juliet was a striking performance. She was the Juliet of her day.

The fame of Miss Neilson now rapidly extended, and at various theatres she appeared in the usual rôles of a leading actress. Amongst these, in comedy, the most successful was Rosalind. It overflowed with life and archness, and was almost wanton in its love of frolic and mischief. After Rosalind's first scene, which was not remarkably effective, the mirth and applause which she called forth was unbounded. To my thinking, she failed, especially in later representations, in the poetry of

the character. The high spirits were almost those of a hoyden, too little those of a princess who had dared to reproach the tyrant duke with his usurpation, and defend her banished father with pious affection; whose joy in her adventure was, in a measure, the delight of escape from a suspicious court, and the indulgence of a wide, genial nature, which, even in its humour, was full of sympathy. However, on the broadly comic side, this Rosalind was very telling, and drew the public far more than do Rosalinds in general. Miss Neilson's defect in this character seemed also that of her Viola. It was arch and clever; but no one could fancy that such a mercurial Viola could have found difficulty in telling her love, or have ever resigned herself to the sad repose of "Patience on a monument."

Lady Teazle, singularly, was one of the actress's least lively embodiments. The repentance of her ladyship in the fourth act was seriously prepared for from the beginning, and the result was an unusually grave version of the part. At the time when it was essayed, however, Miss Neilson had gained such favour with playgoers, that any character in which she appeared proved successful. She was remarkably so in that of Julia in "The Hunchback," a performance which commended itself less to the writer than to the public. It had, when given at the Haymarket, many merits, earnestness amongst the rest. Miss Neilson had also now acquired great knowledge of stage effect and of elocutionary relief; but I had liked her better in Julia when I first saw her, two or three years earlier. She had since then conceived a notion of modernizing Julia—that is, of taming down the grief and self-reproach

of her love, and the desperation of her recoil from a detested bridegroom, to such expressions of these feelings as might be adopted by an excitable young lady of to-day. But truth to the facts of modern life when we are trained to conceal emotion, can never be true to the direct expression of emotion. Imaginative passion, far deeper than transient phases of manner, has the same general language and form in every period. To modernize it—that is, to bound it by the conventional manners of any particular time—is as inevitable a failure as is, in sculpture, the representation of a tinted Venus with coloured eyes. Passionate imagination which deals with the deep realities of the heart and soul, sublimely ignores the petty differences that savour of mere times and manners. Even in the higher comedy we find out of place extreme attention to the requirements of a particular time, and an attempt to present those minute features of human nature which are rather idiosyncrasies than general characteristics; though these have their proper place at times in prose-comedy, and in domestic drama. To return. Though Miss Neilson did not push her “modernization” of Julia to an extreme, she carried it sufficiently far to lose unity of method and abandonment of passion. Now and then an impulse of enthusiasm would seize her, and find itself speedily repressed, that the acting might accord with the manner of a lady in a modern drawing-room. In the great tirade of the last act, where Julia commands, rather than entreats, Master Walter to save her from her approaching marriage, there was, of course, earnestness and energy; but the desperation, the recklessness, the defiance of all consequences to gain her end, were

but tamely suggested. In the celebrated injunction to Master Walter—

*“Do it;  
Nor leave the task to me,”*

there was by no means the electric power with which Fanny Kemble or Helen Faucit carried away the house.

The advice to Phæton to choose the middle course is often to be followed in art when the road taken is the right one. But the road must be consistently pursued to the end. To alternate imagination with realism of habits and manners is a compromise fatal to both kinds of art. Yet it must not be thought, from what has been said, that there was nothing to charm, even to move, in Miss Neilson's Julia. Moreover, at the time of which I write, she had gained unquestionable sway over the public, and the many-sided Julia was one of her most popular representations.

Passing from the character just noticed, we reach one in which her triumph was as deserved as it was signal. This was Isabella in “Measure for Measure.” She first essayed the character, with great success, in America; then, on her return to England, at the Haymarket. When it is remembered that Isabella, by the stern elevation of her character, commands rather the admiring esteem than the sympathy which springs to love or suffering, Miss Neilson's success in the part was indeed remarkable. From her first scene, the purity of Isabella was grasped. A sweet reserve of voice, manner, movement, a mild gravity at the mere hint of folly, seemed to set her apart from the young of her sex. In the second act, when pleading for her brother's life,

it was plain that while her heart yearned to save him, her own purity somewhat magnified his sin, and, for a while, took from her power to contest Angelo's refusal. But when at length she pleaded mercy no less than justice, it would be hard to imagine an outpouring more fervent, more humble, and yet more dignified. Subsequently she produced a telling effect by her intuitive fear of Angelo's evil soundings of her, while, at the same time, her faith in the man himself was as yet unshaken. When, at length, she apprehended his vile proposal that she should buy her brother's life by her shame, the vent of her wrath was like a volley of thunder through a hushed and stirless atmosphere—

"I will proclaim thee, Angelo; look for 't.  
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,  
Or, with an outstretched throat, I'll tell the world  
Aloud, what man thou art."

Most memorable of all was the scene in which she relates to her brother Angelo's refusal of mercy, save on base terms. When, in the beginning, a manly spirit asserts itself in Claudio, and he exclaims—

"If I must die  
I will encounter darkness as a bride,  
And hug it in my arms,"

Miss Neilson's reply, as Isabella, could not well have been excelled in its elevation, its solemnity, and its transport of affection—

"There spake my brother; there my father's grave  
Did utter forth a voice!"

How poor for the moment seemed mortal life, with its brief interests, beside nobility of nature! And when at last Claudio's dread of death makes him seek life at the price of his sister's shame,

Miss Neilson rose to the full height of the position. The scorn of her look, the invectives that rained from her lips, were overwhelming. Passion seemed to give her bodily height and majesty; she towered in her denunciation. Rarely has an audience in the midst of a play been so taken by storm. She was thrice recalled amidst an agitation of delight rarely indeed paralleled.

Long before Miss Neilson's later triumphs, I had accepted an invitation from her father and mother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Lee, of Stoke Bruerne, to meet the favourite actress under their roof. Mr. Lee being a country rector, many of his guests were clergymen, and it was a new and interesting experience to see how the London star would comport herself in their society. Mr. and Mrs. Lee seem to have accepted their son's marriage with a then unnoted actress in a very liberal spirit. They were both devoted to her—glad of the gaiety with which she enlivened their home, proud of the histrionic talents with which she entertained their friends. Very touching, too, was their tender solicitude that she might be protected from the dangers which often beset a brilliant career.

As for the object of this lavish affection, she carried herself in the true spirit of an *enfant gâté*. Rarely did she make her appearance at morning prayers, though observance of that duty was generally held imperative; but her pleas of morning headaches and sleeplessness, or of over-exertion the night before in reciting to the guests, were received with confiding sympathy. She was the life of the circle, and repaid the profuse compliments offered her with easy grace, or, at times, with arch repartee.

Statements since her death go to show that her parentage was obscure; but it is just to say that she was as simple and charming and, save for an impulsive escapade now and then, as composed as if she had been trained to society. It was amusing to see how the grave clerics at her father-in-law's dinner-table brightened up as she amused them with accounts of her inexpertness and ill-success in fishing, or related the terror into which she had thrown two or three of her companions by driving them at mad speed on rough forest paths knotted with boulders and tree-roots. At night she would, perhaps, have the same auditors in a different mood. She would read, or rather recite, "The May Queen;" and when she came to the death-bed resignation of the young sufferer, she would have her priestly listeners in tears at a line which came home to them all—

"And that good man, the clergyman, has taught me words of peace."

Her private recitals were, indeed, at times, even more impassioned than those with which she delighted the public. One evening, being asked at the house of a friend to give "The Charge of the Light Brigade," she seemed absolutely inspired by her theme. She declaimed—

"Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right through the line they broke"

with such an impetuous ardour and scorn of death that one could have fancied her in front of the charge. At—

"Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volleyed and thundered,"



she seemed carried away by exaltation for the brave who dared the storm of fire ; and she had a noble effect towards the end, when the passionate enthusiasm with which she had kindled suddenly fell, and there was a wail like that which follows a soldier's bier in the words—

“ Then they rode back, but *not*—  
Not the six hundred.”

I have heard her recite the same poem in a crowded theatre, and with brilliant success, but never with the overpowering effect of the private recital just mentioned.

As Miss Neilson's fame culminated, I gradually lost sight of her, save for a rare visit at the theatre. Eventually America—where her success surpassed even that gained here—absorbed many months of her later years.

My personal recollections of her were fading into the dimness of the past, when one morning at the sea-coast they were painfully revived by the startling announcement of her sudden death. It took place in Paris, in 1880, when she was only thirty. Alas, for the career that had been so brilliant and, comparatively, so brief !

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## MR. ALFRED WIGAN AND MR. F. ROBSON.

ALFRED WIGAN's qualifications as an actor—Peculiarly successful in French characters—His acting in "To Parents and Guardians," "Monsieur Jacques," "The First Night," "The Corsican Brothers," "The Isle of St. Tropez," "The Roused Lion," "On the Cards" etc.—Want of robustness supplied by nervous force and minuteness—His special excellence in Monsieur Jacques—Anecdote touching his performance of this part at Dover—Appears as Orlando, in 1851, at the Princess's—Also as Prince Henry in "The First Part of King Henry IV."—"Still Waters Run Deep"—Early recognition of his talents by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, under whose management he appeared at Covent Garden, in Sheridan Knowles's play of "Love"—Replaces Harley as Mark Meddle in "London Assurance"—Draws attention to his performances of French characters—Joins the Keeleys at the Lyceum, then goes to the Haymarket—His various characters—His appearance in a comedy by the present writer—His subsequent appearances at the Olympic and the Princess's—He becomes manager of the Olympic—His De Neuville in "Plot and Passion"—Goes to the Adelphi—Assumes management of the St. James's—Appears at the Gaiety—His Adolphe Chavillard in "On the Cards"—Summary of his claims as an actor—His Death. FREDERICK ROBSON—Excitement created by his performances in extravaganza and burlesque—His admirers maintain that he would have succeeded in tragedy proper—General impression of his Shylock and Medea in burlesque—Madame Ristori—His acting in farce and domestic drama—In "A Blighted Being"—In "Daddy Hardacre"—Difference between the qualifications for playing domestic drama in prose and playing tragedy—Robson's Sampson Burr in "The Porter's Knot"—His pathetic humour in acting akin to that of Dickens in fiction

—Robson in “The Chimney Corner,” and in “Camilla’s Husband”—as Desmarets in “Plot and Passion”—Summary—His death.

EXTREME refinement, delicate perception, and truth to nature, combined with deep, though quiet feeling, were the chief characteristics of Mr. Alfred Wigan. These qualities peculiarly fitted him for the representation of various types of Frenchmen. Amongst these were Tourbillon in “To Parents and Guardians,” Monsieur Jacques in the pathetic drama of that name, Achille Talma Dufard in “The First Night,” De Chateau Renaud in “The Corsican Brothers,” the hero of “The Isle of St. Tropez,” Hector Mauléon in “The Roused Lion,” Adolphe Chavillard in “On the Cards,” and several besides. All these pieces were of French origin.

The French Usher at the Clapham school, in “To Parents and Guardians,” was one of the first assumptions that showed his qualifications for playing French characters. The unfortunate *émigré* Tourbillon, who, though noble, has to earn his bread by tuition, and who suffers keenly from the pranks of audacious schoolboys, is one of those figures in which sentiment and humour, dignity and eccentricity, have so quick interchange as to offer wide scope to an artist who had equal command of pathos and humour, though he was, perhaps, something wanting in breadth of passion and in robustness. He was so much an artist, however, that he could often fairly supply these qualities by intensity and by decision of outline. Thus his gallant bearing as De Chateau Renaud in “The Corsican Brothers” atoned for a certain over-delicacy of style, and the ease and martial excitability of his Faulcon-

bridge almost made the spectator forget that full-blooded strength was a vital trait of the illegitimate Plantagenet. In characters that thus taxed his physique, Wigan managed to present much to admire, though not without suggesting that he was substituting what was wanting in more athletic qualities of the mind, so to speak, by trading on nerve power.

In Monsieur Jacques, divided between a pardonable yearning for success in his art and fidelity to the memory of an early love, he played with so true a perception of contrasting features, that the harmless vanities of the part enhanced its pathos, and the spectator was often never nearer tears than when the smile hovered on his lips. The complete finish of the personation, combined with its perfect ease, the quaintness of the broken English, and the actor's peculiar skill in displaying the quick transitions of feeling in French nature, made up a performance in which it would have been hard to suggest an improvement.

I happened to be at Dover on one occasion when Mr. Wigan played Monsieur Jacques in that town. The box in which I was placed projected considerably over the pit, and was, moreover, so shallow that it was difficult to retreat from observation. As the piece went on, I found myself so much moved by the pathos of the representation, that it was with great difficulty I repressed my tears. The temptation to the luxury of woe was, however, violently resisted, as it could not have been yielded to without the knowledge of the entire audience. The strong effort at repression, however, produced so distracting a headache, that, meeting Mr. Wigan next day on the marine walk, I laugh-

ingly reproached him with all that I had suffered. He answered, with pleasant readiness, that he could hardly be expected to regret as he ought a malady which was both a new and emphatic compliment to his acting.

His Achille Dufard in "The First Night," in point of the happy blending of sentiment with humour, and in that highest reality which springs from clear insight into human characteristics, and in truthfulness that rejects all excess in portraying them, fully deserves to be ranked with his Monsieur Jacques.

In "The Isle of St. Tropez" he had to play the part of a man who suffers long from a mysterious disease, and at length finds, by the aid of a mirror which reflects another, that he is being slowly poisoned by one who possesses his affection and confidence. His look of horror and his hushed, mechanical bearing, as of one whose feelings had been petrified by horror, can scarcely be forgotten by any spectator.

In 1851 he performed, at the Princess's, the character of Orlando in "As You Like It." The performance, though delicate, was animated, and showed a keen relish for the adventures with which the piece abounds, which gave his rendering a fit air of romance. In the same year he represented Prince Henry in "The First Part of King Henry IV." with more dignity than is usually assumed, and with great impressiveness in the serious passages. His impersonation was, on the whole, less mercurial, and therefore less popular, than might have been expected. He evidently sought to indicate in the lighter and more familiar moods of the Prince the probability of his future reform and elevation.

To the highest class of his personations belonged his John Mildmay in "Still Waters Run Deep." The powerful effect which he produced with the utmost simplicity of means was a theme of general comment and admiration. The interest of the character consists in the gradual development of acuteness, and mental capacity in general, on the part of one whose reserved demeanour has caused him to be rated as inapprehensive and stupid. The quiet judgment with which the man's real nature was revealed, touch after touch, till it stood out distinctly, recalled the imperceptible growth of some child, whom we have seen day by day, till, in the course of years, we recognize the man. This piece was produced during his management of the Olympic Theatre, to the success of which the talents and counsels of his wife are said to have largely contributed. Her performance of Mrs. Hector Sternhold, in this very piece of "Still Waters," was, perhaps, as fine an instance as can be cited of her mode of producing a strong impression without obvious effort.

The great promise of Mr. Alfred Wigan was early recognized by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews (Madame Vestris), under whose management at Covent Garden, in 1839, he performed the character of "Sir Conrad" in Sheridan Knowles's play of "Love"—a part by no means important, but which requires a gallant carriage and good delivery. Small as the actor's opportunity was, he so improved it as to gain considerable notice, and to recommend himself to his managers and the public. At Covent Garden he also replaced Harley as Mark Meddle in "London Assurance," and began to attra c

attention to his finished performance of French characters. After quitting Covent Garden, he became a member of the Lyceum Company, then under the management of the Keeleys. In 1847 he joined Mr. Webster at the Haymarket, where, as Sir Benjamin Backbite, and as Hector Mauléon in "The Roused Lion," the delicate truthfulness of his acting, and the subtle traits of his characterization became increasingly appreciated. In this year also I was indebted to him for an assumption marked by his habitual ease, polish, and unstrained effect—that of Osborn in "The Heart and the World." It has already been said that this venture was unsuccessful. Mr. Wigan's acting was worthy of a piece better constructed, and of more solid claims. He subsequently appeared at the Olympic and at the Princess's Theatres, the latter being then under the management of Mr. Charles Kean. In 1853 he entered on the management of the Olympic, where his principal characters were his delicate, yet passionate rendering of the lover in "Plot and Passion," and his John Mildmay in "Still Waters Run Deep," which has already been noticed. We find him afterwards at the Adelphi, at the St. James's (as manager), and at the Gaiety, where he performed Adolphe Chavillard in "On the Cards." Adolphe is a travelling conjuror, who discovers that he is the real father of a young girl of whom he has previously only assumed the parentage, and who, by his arts of legerdemain, manages to defeat the designs of a trickster on his daughter. The plot of this piece is to the last degree improbable; but Mr. Wigan admirably availed himself of the opportunity it gave of exhibiting the emotions



of the father and the eccentricities of the conjuror.

In closing these remarks, it may be said that the character of Mr. Wigan's acting was almost unique in his time. Though abounding in the delicate sensibility which often confines actors to the portrayal of a few parts suited to their own individualities, he had sufficient width and keenness of perception to delight in many varieties of human nature. He was, therefore, a versatile actor, large in his range of character, though minute in his treatment of it. Fine as were his touches, he made a strong impression by their judiciousness and their repetition. Like some of the best painters in water-colour, he sometimes produced effects that were almost massive, *quoad* the medium through which they were produced, though they were still not those of oils. He could not claim, as has been said, breadth or robustness of style. As regards finish, quietude, *finesse*, and a power to seize the subtler traits of sentiment or humour, he was admirable. In his day he was probably the most French of English actors. His death took place, at the age of sixty-one, on November 29, 1878.

Of Mr. Frederick Robson, again, striking and original actor as he was, my recollections are fewer than I could wish. I witnessed none of those burlesques and extravaganzas in which he displayed so much passionate intensity, that some admirers believed he would prove a second Edmund Kean in poetic tragedy. A doubt of this conviction has been already expressed in a notice of Mr. Sothern, where it is suggested that the very opportunity of exaggeration afforded by burlesque elicits the display of a quasi-tragic

power which would cease if the condition of exaggeration were withdrawn.

Amongst his triumphs in burlesque, according to report, none were greater than those of his Shylock and Medea. In the latter it is recorded that the foundation of the acting was generally tragic, and that the sentiment only became that of burlesque by being carried to exaggeration. Indeed, it is said, at the point where a blessing is besought for Creusa, the real feeling of the actor refused to be disguised, and the scene became one of absolute pathos. Madame Ristori, whose Medea was one of her greatest successes, was at the Olympic on the production of the burlesque, and a bust of her was exhibited on the stage.

Burlesque apart, however, I saw Mr. Robson in some of his best characters. In the farce of "A Blighted Being," his Job Wort, a neglected and disappointed genius, could have been represented by no actor but Robson, with the double and even simultaneous effect of convulsing the house with the absurdities of the character, and inspiring it with a sense of relief when he escapes the fancied danger that haunts him. In the bitterness of his mortification, Job applies to a friend, a druggist, for some drug that shall end his life gradually and painlessly. His friend affects at last to comply with his request. Job, believing that he has swallowed the insidious poison, and that death is stealthily advancing upon him, at length regrets his rashness, and falls a prey to his terror, which is heightened by the fact that he has fallen in love, with no hope of surviving long enough to marry. At length the disclosure that the drug he had

taken is really harmless enables him to rally, and his union with the object of his affections atones to him for his defeated ambition. As the blighted genius, Robson's melancholy but haughty intonation, his fitful gesture, his look of dejection, alternating with that of pity and contempt for a world unworthy of him, at times a colloquial turn in the midst of highly-wrought excitement, formed a wonderful caricature of the unappreciated man in real life; while his horror of death, though ludicrous under the circumstances, had a ghastly seriousness in it, which, though it only proved the actor's power, was surely somewhat misplaced in burlesque. It was perhaps, however, his union of the terrible with the droll which most recommended him to general favour.

"Daddy Hardacre," drawn from "*La Fille d'Avare*," gave him a character in which, through its eccentricities, he displayed even tragic intensity. The miser's one redeeming feeling—love for his daughter, and his insane idolatry of his gold, afforded an opening for blending and contrasting what is most sordid and pitiful in self-love with what is most touching in love for another. The sordid aspect of the half peasant, half farmer, with his strange pronunciation, was, indeed, so thoroughly and minutely represented as to be generally comic, but without in the least degree detracting from its reality or from the emotional interest. Setting aside Mr. Robson's tragic effects, nothing from his entrance could be more microscopic than his observation of characteristics, nothing more easy and natural than his expression of them. What a true and laughable touch was that of venting his rage on a minor character, who has, unbidden, helped himself to

roll and butter, by a scowl and an aside, which seem to relieve his exasperation—"How ugly yon chap looks wi' his mouth full!" His chuckle, not overdone, at his own astuteness in holding back from a purchase till want forced the owner to sell at a fearful loss; the controlled impatience with which he hears a plea for humanity, as a ceremonial that must be borne with and meant nothing; his intervals of delay in handing out the lawyer's charge for expenses in fractions, thus mitigating the torture of payment by taking it in instalments; his look, as of a good Mussulman to an infidel, when the lawyer tells him that "gold's just the same as notes," and the Miser, gloating over his shiners, answers scornfully, "It is not the same to me, though,"—these are a few of the minor traits of character which, after the lapse of nearly thirty years, are yet vivid to the writer—traits conveyed by a naturalness of expression often most quiet when most intense.

In the second act, how true to nature was his disappointment because Esther, his daughter, received so calmly the guinea he offered her. "Thank you, father." Was that all she had to say for a gift dear to him "as a drop of his heart's blood"? "Hey, hey, lass!" he cries, withdrawing the coin for a time; "does it rejoice thee no more than that to look on a guinea—to know it is thine own, all alone—to hear it chink, chink?" What depths of rapture did his tones convey—tones crooning and gloating, but half hushed, as if it had been profane to utter his transports aloud! How admirable, too, when it has escaped him that she will have a fortune, the conflict between his delight in what he can give her and his dread lest the secret of his wealth

should transpire! How admirably did he thus prepare for the great scene, in which he discovers that his idolized gold has been stolen by his idolized daughter. Her uncle had been suddenly ruined by some commercial panic, and had threatened to escape by suicide from want and disgrace. In vain Esther had pleaded with her father to help him. He was immovable; and, to save the father of the man she loved, she had secretly robbed her own parent. The scene in which these facts burst upon him was appalling. A visit to his hoard had shown him the plunder of it. His changed, almost choked voice, startled you with the sense of a catastrophe before he entered. "Whose voice," you asked—"surely not Robson's?" At length he tottered in, gasping "Mary—Mary!" to the servant. His face drawn and convulsed, his reeling gait, his stifled tones gave the notion of one who had been struck and shrivelled by lightning. "Are you ill?" asks Mary. He can but gasp her name for answer. "What ails you?" asks the lawyer, in wonder. The wild, suspicious misery that can find no vent in words prompts him to seize the lawyer's arm in a fierce clutch. "What are you doing here?" At last he recognizes him and lets him go. Ah, the thief may have been Mary! "Mary, look me in the face! Where is it? Air—air!" No, it can't be Mary; no, the nephew who has been his guest—the son of the ruined man. So—he has left the house! Clear as day. Pursue him! "Run to the justice!" "Summon the constables! Why does the lawyer delay?" With a new burst of fury, which exhausts him—"He's an accomplice; I'll go myself! Ah, I'm dying!" His limbs fail, and he staggers to his

chair. Reviving a little, he bids them bring the thief. He will search him himself, and then he'll have him "hanged—hanged—hanged!"—this in a voice which, by its very exhaustion—a last effort of speech—showed a depth of hatred from which the listeners recoiled. Then a new phase of the crisis arrives. Shocked by the old man's fury against his nephew, Esther confesses the robbery and the motive of it. What!—she, his own child, the thief! No, it's a lie—a lie! But she persists. He raises a chair, as if to strike her. No, no; she had an accomplice, for whose sake she acted—she is merely trying to mask a worse culprit. And then the amazement and the fury gave way, and, with a strange blending of cajolery and real tenderness, he tries to worm from her to whom the money had been given. But she has nothing to say. Then she shall be locked up; she shall starve—rot—die! Esther escapes almost in despair. After a while the father's love, with many ebbs and flows, reasserts itself. "Where is she?" asks Hardacre. He is told that she is in the next room, weeping before her mother's picture. He looks in, softened, and finds that it is so. The lawyer begs him to forgive. At this the old man hardens himself. "Never, never! Shut the door directly. Mary! I'll never forgive her!" he exclaims, with a violence that shakes him, and shows the fierceness of the strife. The door is that of the next room, in which his child is weeping. "*You don't want to shut it close to, ye old fule!*" he continues—a fine touch in the play, but how fine it needed Robson's genius to show—the tones of a voice that had tears in its asperity, and yearning in its impatience.

In all the transitions that we have pointed out, it was the excellence of Robson that the force and variety of his acting had no touch of strain. His fury was as natural and spontaneous as his dryness or his fondling. He was colloquial even in passion; his voice had the rise and fall of all the natural changes which, in real life and in real men, denote mental impulses in their varying excitement or calm. Could he not, then, have played heroic tragedy? His intensity and his truth would have gone far in this direction. But the reality in which he showed at his best needed eccentricity or sharp prosaic traits. It was by this background that his emotions were relieved and coloured and contrasted. The feelings that are common to man gained a sharp, almost stinging individuality, since they displayed themselves amongst the peculiarities that belonged to few men—a result quite opposed to that of ideal art, which discards external peculiarities, lest they should lower or obscure more essential features.

Reverting to Daddy Hardacre, it may be as well to state that the money which Esther had taken was her own fortune, that Hardacre forgives her, and consents to her marriage with her cousin, the more readily that he is willing to take her without her lost dowry.

However much the belief of some that Mr. Robson would have succeeded in poetic tragedy may be dissented from, it is incontestable that, in certain phases of domestic drama, he could excite both tragic pity and terror in the events of actual life. His Daddy Hardacre proves his power above all in the latter; his Sampson Burr in "The Porter's Knot" ("Les Crochets



du Père Martin") above all in the former. Very touching and sweet is this idyllic drama. Sampson Burr, as a porter, amasses, after many years, a little competence, by the help of which he gains his dearest wish—that of seeing his son a doctor. He then undergoes the fearful shock of learning that this idolized son has involved himself in debt to the extent of £2000, takes the burden upon himself, privately affects to have lost the sum, that he may shield his wife, the fondest of mothers, from the knowledge of her boy's disgrace, contrives to send him abroad, and then, a ruined man, resumes in his old age the arduous toil of a porter. The son acquits himself well, and is able in the end to requite his father for the heavy sacrifice made. This little tale abounds in opportunities of pathos, relieved and often deepened by humour. The character would have been successful in many hands, but hardly such a success as in Robson's. If his special merit in work of this kind be asked, the one answer is that he had an uncommon degree of that truth to nature which every actor worth the name must have in some degree, and a power, moreover, of displaying this truth under a variety of aspects. How delightful was his overflow of pride and happiness, with a veil of drollery, half real, half forced, to hide his emotion, when he enters with the son who can now write himself doctor. After he learns that the latter's extravagance has ruined him, how admirable his assumption of high spirits (just a little strained by conscious effort), partly that he may seem a cheery host to his chum, Captain Oakum, who looks in for a farewell dinner, partly to hide the truth from his

wife. The purpose of keeping the dear old mother ignorant of the lad's disgrace ran with Robson throughout the piece, not only in the dialogue, but in looks of tender vigilance and a habit of caution and self-suppression.

No performer lived more in the details of his part, or made them more contrast with each other. Who can forget the scene in the second act, after he returns to his work as a porter? He sits on his truck near the hotel, and gossips with his wife, who brings him his dinner, over old times—old love still fresh for each other, pride in their son, and their hopes for him. The old man has had losses by *speculation* since then—not a whit does the wife guess that the prodigal son has ruined him, and she feels it hard that, in his old age, he has had to go back to his hard work again. As for him, he affects to like it. "He was happy enough in his arm-chair; but, hang it, when he sits on his truck he feels young again!" The truck means the days when Milly was a young wife, when love made labour sweet, and their boy was their future. The cheerful fortitude, with its spark of humour, with which the old man, weary at heart, weary in frame, imposed upon the trusting wife, half suspecting the kind deception, was admirable in its truth, and in that restraint which is the conscience of the artist. The heroism of the sufferer did not parade itself by a touch of overemphasis. He did not merely feign to disguise his grief, and call attention to it by by-play. His forced spirits were not too much forced to seem unnatural to the wife, though they, of course, hid nothing from the audience, who were in

his confidence. The pathetic humour of Dickens seemed to have passed into Robson, making the heroic concealment of grief ten times more touching than its direct utterance. This resemblance to Dickens in various characters planned to suit the actor was often evident. In "The Chimney Corner," for instance, what a flavour of the best kind of cockney was there in his Peter Probity, the oilman! His genial self-importance, his delight in his own shrewdness, his occasional mispronunciation of some ambitious passage, uttered with glib enjoyment, were the rather grotesque frame to a high-minded and loving nature.

It was a feature of Robson's acting that, with his keen sense of humour, and his dislike, save in burlesque, of extravagance, he could rise, without effort, to as high a stress of passion as we ever find displayed in the man of actual life. In this very drama of "The Chimney Corner," when Peter Probity believes that his son has cruelly robbed him, there is an opportunity for indignation and stern despair, melting into an agony of outraged love, of which the actor so availed himself that the emotion of the house almost choked its applause, so genuine was the feeling displayed, so free from a forced, or even a strained note.

In comedy, the value of Robson's temperate method was remarkably shown in a piece entitled "Camilla's Husband," which, though not effective, was the work of a writer who had done better things. Robson's character, in particular, was so factitious, also so far-fetched, and yet commonplace in point of expression, that from the mere perusal of the part one

would expect nothing but failure. Dogbriar is a wandering tinker, with a keen sense of his own acuteness, and much unscrupulousness in the use of it. His histrionic stock-in-trade is largely made up of such phrases as "natur," "feelosophy," and "mo-rality," "needcessity" for "necessity," "inflammation" for "information," "twilight" for "toilette," "flirtation of the heart," possibly in some way akin to "palpitation," though it is difficult to trace the relationship. There were a few better jokes in the dialogue, but too many of the kind specified, while the moralizing of the tinker was as dull and forced as his phrases. Yet there was an air of conviction, a tone of sincerity and consistency in Robson's acting that seemed to make the tinker a philosopher in his way, and gave to his trite sayings the force of axioms. That the piece succeeded was chiefly due to Robson's skill in creating a character from the slightest hints, and to the vigour and romance which Mr. Henry Neville threw into the part of the hero.

The character of Desmarets in "Plot and Passion" gave Mr. Robson his first and signal chance of proving his power in serious drama. Desmarets is all nerve and excitement, so that the part formed a link between the wild intensity of the actor's burlesque creations and those which he portrayed in actual life. A spy and a tool, absorbed in self, unscrupulous and relentless in all that relates to his interest, servile to Fouché, the master whom he envies, detests, and circumvents, capable at once of deep calculation and fierce energy, fired, moreover, with a wild passion for a woman who had stooped awhile to be Fouché's instrument and decoy—the part

furnished a variety of contrasting aspects, which were presented with graphic power and with surprising rapidity of change. In keen observance of his chance to insinuate or to betray, to seize an advantage, or to parry a disaster, Robson, in his various resources, suggested a spider which glides along the lines of its web to repair its mesh, or to dart upon its prey. The greed and venom of the spider had also their symbol in his fierce love for Madame de Fontanges, and his subsequent hatred of her. Brilliant, too, were his contrasts of expression. The bitterest irony or the deadliest menace at times lurked in the softest tones; again, explosions of passion would rend him—passion convulsing face and limb. In a healthier temperament, display might have seemed excessive or distasteful. Here it was true to the character.

There were, of course, many parts for which Mr. Robson was unfitted, both mentally and physically. Small, though not ill-formed, he was quite wanting in what is called "a presence." Dignity, romance, composed, gentle tenderness (he had abundant tenderness mixed with humour), the lighter graces of comedy, were not for him. But for such conceptions as lay within his range, he had the gift of gifts—self-identification. The "*si vis me flere*" may be extended to every emotion. Robson made the listener feel, because he felt himself. This original actor died, at the age of forty-three, in August, 1864.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## MADEMOISELLE RACHEL.\*

Rachel's benefit at Her Majesty's Theatre, in June, 1841.—She appears in a French version of Schiller's "Marie Stuart"—Is supported by an array of celebrated artistes—Her personal appearance, voice, etc.—Her acting in "Marie Stuart"—Macready's exception to her—Her great performance in "Phèdre" described at length—Her acting a combination of classic and romantic art—Her sympathy with the indigent of her own profession.

It was a night to remember, the night when I first saw Rachel—Rachel, who had resuscitated in France the dead glories of the classic drama, whose fame rang through Europe, who was hailed everywhere, except by the rivals whom she had supplanted, as a genius—one of those rare beings in whom "life is at blood-heat," and whose keen perceptions and sympathies seemed intuitions.

I went to "Her Majesty's" that 14th of June, 1841, in a state of almost feverish excitement. It was the night of her benefit. Besides her own attraction in Lebrun's tragedy of "Marie Stuart," † a reduction into one act of Molière's

\* Though the great French actress hardly falls within the scope of this work, it is thought these few recollections of her will not be unwelcome.

† Founded on, though not absolutely adapted from, Schiller's tragedy.

"Bourgeois Gentilhomme" was to be given in the concert-scene, of which Mesdames Grisi, Persiani, Loewe, and Viardot, Signori Rubini, Mario, Lablache, Tamburini, Mademoiselles Cerito, Guy Stéphan, Keppler, Pierson, and M. Albert were to appear. This supplementary entertainment, introducing the most eminent singers and *danseuses* of a time when ballet was still a fine art, and equally attractive with opera, was a rare homage on the part of those offering it to the genius of Rachel, who, indeed, had been the idol of London society, from the Court downwards.

The keen interest of speculative curiosity was now to give way to that of knowledge. Rachel at length appeared. Tall, slender, almost to fragility, with mobile face, but pale as that of a statue, and lit up with what Edwin Forrest so aptly called her "flaming eyes," she riveted the gaze at once. In those eyes, in that marble face (which could yet at will become so flexible), life seemed to have invaded the domain of death—death not repulsive, but composed and queenly. To follow her declamation, again, when she began to speak, was an absolute delight. A voice deep, resonant, and vibrating with the feeling to be uttered—capable of becoming harsh and piercing, or of subsiding into the softest and most significant of whispers—she had at her command the demi-semitones of expression, each being given with such just precision, that sound seemed as definite as colour. These merits never failed her in any of her characters, and they exerted their charm in "Marie Stuart," though not one of her best. In the great scene with Elizabeth, her passion, though intense,



was vixenish and unqueenly. It is, perhaps, hard to invest the dialogue of the Queen-Scold with dignity. Ristori surmounted this difficulty better than Rachel; but she owed to the latter that resistance of the proud, stubborn knee which wavered and stiffened again and again before Marie sank crushed at Elizabeth's feet. Before this, however, Rachel made one of her finest points in the look of exultation when she sees how deeply her taunts have pierced her rival. Rachel's outburst of hatred in this scene doubtless descended to the spiteful, and it helps to illustrate the view of Macready—who, nevertheless, greatly admired her—that "her anger was sometimes too petty and wanting in loftiness." In any case, however, her anger was real, intense, consuming; and this, with the wonderful charm of a delivery which could paint every shade of feeling, was enough to make her greatness felt even in her least perfect characters.

In "*Phèdre*," which I saw, some years later, at the St. James's, her genius was, by general consent at its summit. The actress had scarcely entered upon the scene before she possessed you. Who was this so fragile, so prostrate, that, as she clung to her nurse for support, united and harmonized the opposite extremes of bodily decay and emotional life? In the eye so aflame with mental anguish, one saw it was the very strength of the passions that preyed upon the frame; it was the anger of offended Venus that consumed her with an unlawful love. She was no common sufferer. The victim of a goddess, she shared the supernatural dignity of her persecutor. Hesitating with shame, yet yearning for the relief of avowal, to CEnone, her

nurse and confidante, she at length gasped forth her secrets—the hatred of Venus and the unholy passion inspired for her son-in-law. With what yearning sympathy of despair fell from Rachel's lips the words that recalled the former vengeance of the goddess on one of her race—

“Ariane, ma sœur, de quel amour blessée  
Vous mourutes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée !”

Or who that heard and saw them can forget those broken tones, those shifting looks, that final abasement of the head, in which passion, shame, and yet feverish joy revealed themselves with equal intensity, when CEnone uttered the name of Hippolyte, and the great actress exclaimed—

“C'est toi qui l'as nommé !”

To dwell upon Rachel's excellence in the various aspects of Phèdre, would be to quote the tragedy almost entire. In her vain struggles against the curse of Venus which inspires her incestuous passion ; in the scene in which, after the rumoured death of Theseus, she seeks Hippolytus, ostensibly in his own interests, but really through the irresistible impulse of her love, and betrays her guilty passion to its object ; in the scene where, having learned that Theseus still survives, she stands rooted and horror-struck with the fear that Hippolytus will betray her secret to her husband—comment can only be reiterated admiration, so powerfully was every feeling shown in its general scope, yet with such just precision in detail. The lines which she utters in dread expectation of meeting her husband and her son, may, perhaps, be singled

out as an unsurpassed example of mixed and conflicting grief, shame, and infatuated love—

“Mon époux va paraître et son fils avec lui,  
Je verrai le témoin de ma flamme adultère,  
Observer de quel front j’ose aborder son père ;  
Le cœur gros de soupirs qu’il n’a point écoutes,  
L’œil humide de pleurs par l’ingrat rebutes.”

The reluctant consent of Phèdre that Hippolytus shall be charged with having tempted her to infidelity is an unworthiness which Racine’s ingenuity has been unable to excuse. Rachel did whatever was possible in this position, by letting her consent be wrung from her under the stress of a tortured and distracted mind—above all, under the panic into which she falls at the approach of her husband and her son. This mood of terror and prostration Rachel contrasted in the next act, when she has learned the love of Hippolytus for Aricie, with a burst of passion which well deserved the hackneyed epithet, “electric.” Her agony at the thought of a successful rival seemed to overflow in rage at destiny which had ordained this terrible trial—in hatred and suspicion even of her confidante, C  none, as of one less wretched than herself. As she brooded on the future joys of the lover, there was a gleam of insane envy in her eyes, accompanied by a cry of despair and fury which might have expressed the torture of some savage animal struck with its death-wound. And when the paroxysm was somewhat spent, and C  none endeavoured to soothe her by pointing out that the lovers would be separated and see each other no more, the yearning but hopeless tenderness of Rachel’s tones, as she answered—

“Ils s’aimeront toujours,”

was a transition from one emotion to another in which she, with her sudden force and vividness of contrast, was always felicitous.

After such admiration as has already been given to Rachel in this character, the reader's credulity may be taxed by the assertion that all she had achieved before was surpassed by her great soliloquy in the fourth act, with which the words just quoted commence. In the terrible review of her own guilt there was no violence. The passage was delivered in a chair, with little but most significant gesture, and with an awful calmness, as if she had already been arraigned before Minos, and were hushed in a dread self-listening, while her lips repeated her own indictment. But, in all this calmness, there was a thrilling force, so deep, and, in a sense, so delicate, that it seemed as if guilty emotion, speaking to itself, dared only *whisper*. Long after hearing them, I was haunted by those accents, which seemed to die away under their load of terror, when she imagined Minos in hell, recognizing the guilty one as his offspring—

“ Ah, combien frémira son ombre epouvantée,  
Lorsqu'il verra sa fille à ses yeux présentée.”

This trance of suppressed misery was at length broken by its own intensity, and when the actress, with a cry of piercing supplication, cried, “ Pardonne ! ” there was not a soul amongst the audience that did not seem to plead with her. The terrible malediction on C  none, delivered as if by one whose wretchedness gave authority to her curse, fitly closed an act in which the spectator, for a time, forgot admiration in identification with the sufferer. In the last

act, Phèdre has only to exonerate Hippolytus, to confess her own guilt to Theseus, and to die by the poison which she had taken. All this was accomplished by Rachel with a despairing grief and penitence that foresaw new terrors beyond the grave, and robbed death of its consolation.

It may be true, as said Thèophile Gautier, that on the whole, in expressing the gentler and more tender emotions of womanhood, "Rachel fut froide comme l'antiquité;" but she could express the tortures of unhappy love and of remorse, and the transports of indignation with the fervour, the minuteness, and variety of the romantic school, and also with the noble and imposing outlines of classic art. In her, beauty and grandeur of utterance and attitude entered into the expression of the strongest passion. There was grace in her fury, majesty in her despair. She left vacant in France a throne of genius which none of her successors (many of them highly endowed) can hope to fill. Her death took place in January, 1858.

Though sprung from obscure parentage, she gained, as it were intuitively, after her success, the bearing of a social queen. Accused, and perhaps not unjustly, of avarice, she had yet a tender sympathy for the needy of her own profession. My late friend, Dr. Doran, who met her repeatedly in Paris, often testified to the ease and dignity of her manner in society, and to the playful charm with which she would wind up an evening of which she had been the life, by making a *quête* on behalf of her less fortunate brothers and sisters.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## GENERAL RECOLLECTIONS.

MR. LISTON—Some features of his acting—Leigh Hunt's praise of him—His sensibility to pathos—An instance—His death. MR. TYRONE POWER—Characteristics of his style—"The Irish Lion," "The Irish Attorney," "His Last Legs," etc. MR. JOHN PRITT HARLEY—Rather an amusing than a fine comedian—His Sir Benjamin Backbite, Acres, and Sir Phenix Clearcake in Jerrold's "Bubbles of a Day"—Wanted individuality in Shaksperian parts—The original Mark Meddle in "London Assurance"—The original John Blount in Knowles's "Old Maids"—The original Cox in "Box and Cox"—His various qualifications as an eccentric comedian—Casual meetings with him—His death. MR. ROBERT STRICKLAND—His characteristics as a comedian—His Polonius—His Sir William Fondlove in "The Love Chase"—The original Sir John Vesey in "Money"—His acting in "Tom Noddy's Secret." MR. DAVID REES—The original Stout in "Money"—His brief career—His death. MR. BENJAMIN WRENCH—The original Dudley Smooth in "Money"—His acting described—His Dudley Smooth recalled at this day by Mr. Frank Archer—The wider range of the latter actor. MR. JAMES WALLACE—Accepted alike in high comedy and in melodrama—Also in certain parts in tragedy—His Alessandro Massaroni in "The Brigand"—His Don Cæsar de Bazan—His Ulric in "Werner"—Mr. James Anderson in the same character—Wallace as Macduff—As Martin Heywood in "The Rent Day," and Raphael Doria in "Nina Sforza"—Had some resemblance to Charles Kemble's manner—His death. MR. AND MRS. BARTLEY—Mr. Bartley's Falstaff—His Colonel Damas—His death—Mrs. Bartley, the once celebrated Miss Smith, who chiefly personated the characters of Mrs. Siddons—Her death. MR. EDWARD WILLIAM ELTON—His Amintor in "The Bridal"—In "The Lady of Lyons"—His Richard the Third—The Syncretic Society—Mr. Elton

attends one of its early meetings—Speaks on the difficulties of advancement in the actor's profession—Lost in the wreck of the *Pegasus*—Tributes to his memory—Hood's address at the benefit for his family given at the Haymarket. MR. LEIGH MURRAY—His position as a *jeune premier*—His grace, fine elocution, and prepossessing appearance—His Raphael Duchatlet in "The Marble Heart"—Various characters—Summary of his merits—Stage manager to Mr. Farren at the Olympic—Mrs. Leigh Murray in *Marie de Méranie*—Leigh Murray's death—His appearance in his younger days. MRS. CHIPPENDALE.

IN this chapter will be included recollections of such performers as the writer saw too seldom to comment upon at length. Some of these, like John Liston, were actors of great celebrity. His personation of "the old stager" has already been noticed in the paper on the younger Charles Mathews. I saw Liston in two or three other parts at the Olympic Theatre, when under Vestris, but the slight plots in which he figured, all except that of "The Old and Young Stager," have faded from my mind. Curiously, with the forgetfulness of the pieces in which he performed, I retain a lively impression of his style. He was capable, in some measure, of adapting himself to various parts. He could be a rustic, cockney, or a gentleman; but in almost every character he evinced quiet, intense self-satisfaction, and ludicrous gravity in absurd sayings and doings. His humour was often to seem insensible to the ludicrous, and a look of utter unconsciousness on his serene and elongated face would accompany the utterance of some absurdity or sly jest, and rouse shouts of laughter, while he stood monumentally calm. His greatest success was in "Paul Pry," produced at too early a period for my recollection. Leigh Hunt, however, praises him highly in a number of characters, especially



in rustics. Mr. Liston had a kind and sympathetic nature, and the cause of so much mirth in others was easily affected at the theatre by a pathetic speech or situation. I once saw him, at the Haymarket Theatre, weeping copiously at a touching passage in a play, I think by Miss Vandenhoff. He sat in front of the dress-circle, and the tears, which he made no effort to conceal, streamed down his face. He died in his seventieth year, in March, 1846.

Another public favourite of whom I saw but little, as he played chiefly in after-pieces, was the famous actor of Irish character, Mr. Tyrone Power, who perished on his homeward voyage from America, in the wreck of the *Pegasus*, early in 1841. Of his archness, his sly, wheedling *bonhomie*, his audacity, tempered and carried off by animal spirits, and his delightful enjoyment—rather deep than boisterous—of fun, I retain from my youthful days a lively impression. I saw him in such pieces as “The Irish Lion,” “The Irish Attorney,” “His Last Legs,” etc., but at this date I have a better recollection of himself than of the pieces in which he appeared.

Mr. John Pritt Harley always suggested to me the figure of an old court jester with his cap and bells. He had too little depth, too little discrimination of character, to merit the name of a fine comedian, but he was, beyond doubt, a very amusing one. In his own airy, chattering, mercurial way he overflowed with fun and self-enjoyment, and if one never expected Harley to lose himself in his part, one was tolerably content that the part should be lost in Harley. In a conception, however, that fell in with his own individuality, such as Sir Phenix Clearcake in

Douglas Jerrold's "Bubbles of the Day," or in Sir Benjamin Backbite in "The School for Scandal," of whom he gave a light, rattling version, instinct with the thoughtless enjoyment of a satirical hit, he was capital. Amongst his best displays was his performance of Acres, which is in itself so farcical that no one felt his extravagant comicality in it to be greatly misplaced. As to Sir Phenix Clearcake, the *ciderant* auctioneer, in whom Jerrold has scarcely travestied the bombastic announcements of George Robins, Harley was more at home than in any other part that I recollect. He revelled, when naming any house or locality, in recalling those features of it which he would have emphasized in a placard, or in a verbal eulogy from the auctioneer's pulpit. So much seemed use and natural bias to have hidden from him his own absurdities, that his fervour was delightfully unconscious of excess when, in extolling the charms of Elysium House, he singled out "the ruins of the distant castle in a most perfect state of repair, the cataracts with their terrific thunder softened to the nerves of the most timid lady, and the golden moon which, in that favoured region, is always at the full."

In Shakspeare, Harley was wanting in individuality. His Touchstone in "As You Like It," his Clown in "Twelfth Night," and his Bottom in "A Midsummer's Night's Dream," were all droll enough, and excited the laughter of the many, but were wanting in all differencing traits, except those which the language of the dramatist had necessarily imposed upon them. He was the original Mark Meddle in "London Assurance," at Covent Garden, in 1841—a character which,

though fairly amusing, is only subordinate. The success which Harley gained in it was chiefly due to his overdone effects of facial expression. In the same year, at the same theatre, he appeared as John Blount, the jeweller's son, in Knowles's "Old Maids." The shallow, conceited, but not ill-natured personage, though of no real importance, was tolerably suited to the performer, and proved, perhaps, as diverting as any other character in that not very diverting comedy. He was the original Cox to Mr. Buckstone's Box in the farce that, through the humours of these two actors, gained so great a celebrity. If Harley had little insight into character, he had such gaiety, whim, vivacity, *bonhomie*, and such resources (often overtaxed) of look and gesture, that he was a general favourite. I had sometimes a pleasant chat with this amusing actor and genial man during his engagement at the Princess's Theatre under Mrs. Charles Kean. I had hoped to avail myself of his hospitable invitations to know him more intimately, but opportunity failed—for a short time, indeed, but till too late. Mr. Harley died at the age of seventy-two, in the summer of 1858.

Of comedians not absolutely in the first rank, few should be spoken of with more respect than Mr. Robert Strickland, who died so long ago as 1845, aged forty-seven. Though not an actor of subtlety, he threw great vigour and breadth into all characters that lay within his range, and he essayed few that were beyond it. His Polonius to Charles Kemble's Hamlet, at the Haymarket, in 1835, seemed to me a sound and telling, though somewhat conventional, performance. He was the Sir William Fondlove in

Sheridan Knowles's "Love Chase." The rejuvenescence of the elderly baronet under the charms of Widow Green, and his rapture in extolling them, evinced by many a chuckle and many a hearty slap of his thigh, smacked of a well-known type of the hearty old Englishman. He identified himself with it, however, with so much warmth and vigour as to contribute largely to the success of the comedy. Mr. Strickland was also the original Sir John Vesey in the comedy of "Money," whose cant and worldliness he very ably brought out. One of his best parts was that of the old schoolmaster in "Tom Noddy's Secret," produced in 1838. A child, a foundling, apparently of the masculine sex, who had been left in his charge turns out to be a girl, and the schoolmaster with a failing memory is thus involved in many absurd perplexities. "Tom Noddy's Secret," chiefly on account of Strickland's acting, became very popular.

Having just spoken of "Money," I may here give a line to Mr. David Rees, who performed Stout in that comedy. His fussy, panting, impetuous manner, with evident relish of his vocation, made a feature of the democratic politician. The career of Mr. Rees was, unfortunately, short. He died at Dublin, in 1843.

The name of Mr. Benjamin Wrench, who died at the age of sixty-seven, in 1843, deserves mention, if only for his admirable performance of Dudley Smooth in "Money." The cool adventurer, with a measure of good taste and *savoir-faire*, could have had no better representative. There was a slight, very slight nonchalance in his manner towards the men of fashion with whom he associated, which gave them to under-

stand that he knew his value. Thus he had now and then brief silences when addressed, and stood as if lost in solving some problem, with a ruminating movement of the mouth, as if chewing the cud of his thoughts. Then, seeming to remember, he would answer his interlocutor with a quiet, affable smile, and faintly apologetic. He had just those qualities of coolness and calculation which are essential to the *chevalier d'industrie*, with the air of quiet, careless, amiable ease which implies equality with companions of a higher grade and yet conciliates their liking. At the present date, Mr. Frank Archer, who was probably not born at the time of Wrench's death, singularly recalls some of the best features of the original Dudley Smooth. Wrench, however, had a far narrower range than Mr. Frank Archer, whose acting, for instance, as the Rev. Julian Gray in "The New Magdalen," and as the Editor in the recent drama of "Christine," combines the sincerity and force of English characterization with the ease and finish of French art.

A conspicuous actor in his time was Mr. James Wallack, who had gained acceptance not only in some celebrated parts in plays and comedy, such as Faulconbridge, Doricourt, Don Felix, Harry Dorn-ton, but also in domestic drama and melodrama. He appeared also with effect in several important parts in tragedy, such as Macduff, and Ulric in "Werner." One of his famous characters was Alessandro Massaroni in "The Brigand," for which his gallant appearance and dashing style won general favour. There was, perhaps, a touch of theatricality in his manner, and some excess in attitudinizing, which in his day were easily overlooked in melodrama, but which in our day, when even tameness is preferred to exaggeration,

might have been more hardly dealt with. Perhaps his crowning effort in melodrama, because giving him the widest scope, was Don Cæsar de Bazan. It was a part for which his grace of person and carriage, the impulsiveness of his style both in comic and serious passages, signally qualified him. He was, in a word, good in all characters that asked for bearing and dash. He was a picturesque Ulric in "Werner," assigning to that astute, unscrupulous personage a prompt decision and haughty grace of manner which almost commanded respect. In Ulric, Wallack and Mr. James Anderson were so nearly equal that it would be difficult to give either the preference. Wallack was, moreover, a spirited Macduff, though he could not approach the rough pathos of Phelps in the scene where the Thane hears of the slaughter of his wife and children. Spontaneous pathos, indeed, was hardly one of this actor's gifts, though in certain characters, such as Martin Heywood in "The Rent Day," he could be very affecting. But one was touched chiefly by the manliness and fortitude of the actor, which gave even to a somewhat forced expression of feeling a value perhaps chiefly due to contrast. In 1841 he played, at the Haymarket, Raphael Doria in "Nina Sforza" to the Spinola of Macready and the Nina of Miss Helen Faucit. His picture of the ardent but faithless lover was marked by the refined impulsiveness which was one of his special merits, while his remorse had all the effects by which skill and practice try to substitute genius. *Longo intervallo*, Mr. James Wallack had points of likeness to Charles Kemble. He was an efficient actor in many parts, excellent in a few. He died in New York, in his seventy-fourth year, 1864.

Though I could never fully understand the merits of Mr. George Bartley, his prominence as a comedian entitles him to mention. The character in which he gained most applause was that of Falstaff. To me, his main qualification for "the fat knight" seemed to be his fatness. He was, to my thinking, dull and mechanical in the part. One missed the sharp twinkle of the eye, the vivacity, the self-enjoyment that should extend even to Falstaff's unblushing inventions. Mr. Bartley was probably correct enough in design, but he carved out methodically, and fell short of impulse. He was a serviceable actor in characters that did not ask too much from him. That in which I liked him best was General Damas in "The Lady of Lyons." The shrewdness of the man, his bluff good-heartedness, and his spice of temper were capitally blended. They were the very qualities to find favour with a British audience. His death occurred in 1858, when he was in his sixty-fifth year. The wife of Mr. Bartley was the once-celebrated Miss Smith, who was considered impressive in Lady Macbeth and other characters of Mrs. Siddons. She died in 1850, at the age of sixty-five.

Amongst actors of the second class, Edward William Elton claims a brief record. The character in which he most pleased me was Amintor in "The Bridal," adapted by Knowles from "The Maid's Tragedy." His love for the bride who had married to disgrace him had a tenderness of worship which, though it approached timidity, was finely carried out and chivalrous in its reverence. When, on their bridal night, Evadne repulsed Amintor from her chamber, the amazement of the young husband was quickly blended with



even more grief for her than for himself. The loss of reason in Evadne seemed to him more likely than the loss of nobleness and virtue. It was only before the irresistible evidence of her consistent and shameless guilt, of his being made an unconscious pander to the king, that his faith in her gave way. Excellent, too, was the manner in which, with his friend and brother-in-law, Melantius, he strove by reserve and forced levity to hide Evadne's disgrace. When pressed home he could no longer keep it secret. He seemed to enter into the feelings of the brother as if they had been his own, while, with the utterance of the fatal truth, the collapse of hope and energy on the very threshold of life was strikingly shown in look and gesture. Under the management of Macready at Drury Lane, Mr. Elton was the original Beauseant of "The Lady of Lyons." His firm outline of that character, plausible and heartless, though with a vein of sardonic humour, formed the model from which none of his successors diverged. At Drury Lane also "The Patrician's Daughter" had the advantage of Mr. Elton's co-operation. Considering his great ability, it was much to be regretted that his part was brief, and presented but few opportunities. The writer, when a lad, had seen him as Richard the Third in the old Queen's Theatre, in Tottenham Street. So far as the young critic's judgment went, it was a judicious and varied performance, by no means wanting either in the ironical humour and plausibility of the part or in vigour. It seemed, however, to fall short of Butler's version of Richard in quick decision and fire, and in the broad contrast of these qualities with sinister levity and deceit.

Under Macready, both at Covent Garden and

Drury Lane, Mr. Elton, though contributing greatly to the completeness of the pieces produced, had little scope for the worthy display of his abilities. Shortly before Macready became lessee of Drury Lane, a body, previously described, called "The Syncretic Association," was founded. The early meetings of this body were held at the house of a friend of the writer. At one of these meetings Mr. Elton was present, and, while speaking most modestly of his own claims, set forth strikingly the hardships of the performer who can only exhibit his powers by the will of his manager, and who, in the confined arena of the theatre, is often doomed to obscurity because he has never had the chance to succeed. The quiet and graceful earnestness of Mr. Elton's manner was very winning. A little talk with him before he left seemed to prepare me for all that I afterwards heard of his worth and of his mental refinement. His loss in the lamentable wreck of the *Pegasus*, bound from Edinburgh to London, in July, 1843, called forth deep and wide-spread regret. Members of his own profession joined with comparative strangers in prompt and liberal help to his family. The address written by Thomas Hood, and spoken by Mrs. Warner, for their benefit, at the Haymarket, may be noticed as one of the most moving appeals ever made to public sympathy.

In the interval between Mr. James Anderson—who, in his early days, was perhaps the best type of the romantic *jeune premier*—and the far more realistic *jeunes premiers* who may be said to have come in with the Robertsonian comedy, the late Mr. Leigh Murray may be said to hold a mediate position, with a decided leaning to the

young men of the earlier school. He made his first London appearance at the Princess's, April, 1845, in "The Hunchback," as Sir Thomas Clifford, to the Julia of Miss Charlotte Cushman. On this occasion, though rather under-acting his part, his intelligence, feeling, grace of manner, the charm of an elocution correct, though unobtrusive, and his prepossessing appearance at once secured him public favour, and gave promise of the time when practice should further develop his powers. Probably his crowning success in serious drama was his performance at the Adelphi, in 1854, of Raphael Duchatlet, in the drama from the French, entitled "The Marble Heart." The part played by Leigh Murray was that of a young sculptor. He played it with all the trusting susceptibility of youthful genius to the charm and seduction of mere beauty, with an infatuated abandonment to his passion, an utter collapse at the worthlessness of his idol, and a desperation when, for a moment, he stood at bay, that made the conception thoroughly intellectual and tragic. There was a feminine touch in his sensibility which was quite in place here. Amongst his original characters may be named Sir Gervase Rokewood in "Two Loves and a Life," at the Adelphi; Stephen Plum in "All that Glitters is not Gold," at the Olympic; Matthew Bates in "Time Tries All," at the same house; and Harry Damon in "A Novel Expedient," at the Haymarket. His comic acting was marked by refined vivacity, as his serious acting was by refined feeling. In comedy, besides being true to the human nature of his part, he now and then showed a touch of realism borrowed from the habits of the day; but there was always significance in it—always suggestion of character; it was never mere ludicrous

trick or grimacing. Mr. Leigh Murray only wanted more robustness of physique and of execution to have been a successful actor in tragedy. He was delightful both as a comedian and, within limits which he seldom or never sought to surpass, as an emotional actor.

In 1850 Mr. Farren was lessee of the Olympic, and Mr. Leigh Murray his stage-manager. During the rehearsal of "*Marie de Méranie*" I was much struck by the poetic subtlety and practical value of his suggestions, by which the piece much profited. And I may, perhaps, be permitted to record, in connection with it, my debt to Mrs. Leigh Murray for a piece of acting of genuine delicacy and feeling, in which she gave valuable support to Miss Helen Faucit.

Mr. Leigh Murray, who died at the age of forty-nine in 1870, had, in his younger days, a slight but elegant figure. His features were correct and delicate, the brow being finely moulded, and thrown into relief by dark and rippling hair. His dark eyes, too, were large and brilliant, and gave force to a face which might otherwise have presented an almost feminine softness.

By the death of Mrs. Chippendale, towards the end of May, 1888, we have lost one of our best actresses in the class of parts assigned to Mrs. Glover and Mrs. Stirling. Without being intellectually their equal, Mrs. Chippendale was an effective actress, and well versed in the traditions of her characters.

THE END.

